

A
Winter - Evening
CONFERENCE
BETWEEN
NEIGHBOURS.

PART III.

By J. GODDMAN, D.D.

Φθίσουσιν ἐν χειρὶ ἀμιλίαι κακαί.
Ex Menand. in *Thaïde*.

Evil Communications corrupt good Manners,
1 Cor. 15. 33.

L O N D O N,

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IMPRIMATUR.

*C. Alston, R. P. D.
Hen. Episc. Lond.
à Sacris.*

*Jan. 10.
1688.*

TO THE
READER.

THE Papers before thee contain a Relation of a Third Conference, between the same Persons who held the two former, (which were made publick about two years since.) And this is pursuant of the same general Design that was then laid; namely, to raise the rate and subject of Mens Conversation, and to bring religious Discourse a little more into fashion: than which nothing can be more gentile and manly, nor any thing either more usefull, pleasant or graceful, when once Men are accustomed to it, and know how to manage it with an equal temperature of affection and gravity.

The special matter of the present Conference is jointly to represent, as well the prudence and comfortableness, as the just reason and necessity of Religion.

And whether that great Point be here made out with that clear evidence which such a Subject deserves and requires, must be left to thy judgment.

To the Reader.

But if I shall not be thought too much a Party to interpose my Opinion, I profess sincerely that I verily think both the interest of Piety and of comfortable living are hereby considerably promoted.

And as for the Persons that spent their Winter-Evening in this manner ; I can assure thee, that they are so well satisfied in this employment of their time , that (though probably thou wilt never hear more of them in Print, yet) they are resolved to continue this course privately among themselves ; as finding it to be both more delightfull, and more profitable, than either Coffee-House-Club or Tavern-Assignations.

That which I am to request of thee at present is, That thou wilt consult thy Reason and Conscience in the perusal of these Papers, and (for the time at least) lay aside Drolling Wit and Phantastry : For I am well aware, that if thou canst find in thy Heart to trifle in so serious a Concern, thou mayst raise a Prejudice in thy self and others against what is here presented : for that temper will easily apprehend several little things to play upon in this way of writing.

But if thou wilt use that Candour with which the former Essays of this kind were entertained, thou wilt then look attentively
at

To the Reader.

at the main Design, and finding that to be both pious and generous, dispose thy self to make such allowances for Circumstances as use to be made to private Conversation amongst Friends and Neighbours, considering that in those Cases Men usually speak with almost the same security that they think.

There is one thing more which I am obliged to Preface on the behalf of Sebastian; That whereas in the proving to Biophilus, That there is a God, and in explicating the Divine Nature, he hath made use of two or three Metaphysical Terms, thou wilt not impute it either to his Affectation of hard words, or much less think that he takes Sanctuary in obscure Phrases: but rather consider that it was impossible to avoid them without multiplying words, and so drawing the Argument out at so great a length, as would have been much more inconvenient than that which thou complainest of.

I add no more, but heartily commend this little Book to thy acceptance, and thee to the Grace of God, and the comforts of his Ho'y Spirit.

Farewel.

*The Characters of the Persons in
the following Conference.*

Sebastian, a Learned and Pious Gentleman, who takes all occasions of engaging those he converses with, in sobriety and a sense of Religion.

Philander, a Gentile and Ingenious Person, but too much addicted to the lightnesses of the Age, till reclaimed by the Conversation of *Sebastian*.

Biophilus, a Sceptical Person who had no settled Belief of any thing; but especially was averse to the great Doctrines of Christianity, concerning the Immortality of the Soul and the Life to come; and therefore consequently was much concerned for the present Life. Till at length awakened by the discreet Reasonings of *Sebastian*, and the affectionate Discourses of *Philander*, he begins to deliberate of what before he despised.

The ARGUMENT of the Third CONFERENCE.

Sebastian and Philander, two very good Men and intimate Friends, meeting together at the House of Biophilus, (in pursuance of a former Resolution taken between them) under the Allegorical disguise of a Journey to Urania, begin to talk warmly of Religion and another World. Biophilus, who had never yet entertained any serious Apprehensions of those matters, wonders at their Discourse. which he esteems to be no better than Romantick, and professes his suspicion, that either Wine had heated them, or Enthusiasm had transported them. Both which groundless conceits of his, when Sebastian had effectually confuted, he then proceeds to make a twofold Effort upon Biophilus, to bring him into the same sense of things with himself and Philander. In the former he attacks him where he thought he was most accessible; and upon the account of prudence, and the common concern of self-preservation, presses him to a regard of Religion, as that without which no Man can either live or die comfortably. And when by this means he had in some measure dispo-

sed him to be serious, he then in the second place represents to him the whole Scheme of Religion, and now renders it as rational in it self, as before he had shewed it to be prudent and important. Hereupon the Sceptical Gentleman, after abundance of shifts and evasions, is at last brought to a Non-plus. And thenceforth begins to enquire very modestly into the nature of Religion in general, and of the Christian Religion in particular; which when Sebastian had also instructed him in, he promises to study it diligently for the time to come. Then Sebastian and Philander leaving him under that good resolution, entertain one another with very pious and usefull Discourses, partly of the necessity of constancy in Religion, and the considerations that will maintain it, partly of the means of obtaining and preserving an even temper of spiritual comfort through the whole course of a Christian Life. And so the Night parts them.

A Win-

A Winter-Evening
C O N F E R E N C E
B E T W E E N
N E I G H B O U R S .

P A R T III.

*Sebastian, Philander, Bio-
philus.*

Sebastian. **W**ELL met again, Gentlemen; I hope we shall one day meet in Heaven.

Philander. God grant it, good *Sebastian*; and truly for my part, I am perswaded we shall the sooner come there, the more we have of your Company and Conversation in the mean time.

Sebast. No Complements, *Philander*; I am glad to observe you so chearfull. Come, Gentlemen, what think you of our Journey, I hope
by

by this time *Biophilus* is resolved : You promised, Sir, to consider of it.

Biophilus. I have considered a little, but in truth I think Winter no good time for travelling, especially for the undertaking of so long a Journey.

Sebast. Be not discouraged, Sir, the Journey is not so long as perhaps you may fancy it to be; and the way is so very good, that it is but taking up a good Resolution, and we shall be there presently.

Phil. Nay (if I mistake not) we may make some considerable advance that way, even as we now sit by the Fire-side.

Bioph. You talk merrily, *Phil*. Like a Man that hath travelled all the world over in a Map, and yet never went beyond the Smoke of his own Chimney.

Sebast. You will think it strange perhaps, but it's very true, that no time so good as Winter for this Expedition; the short days, dark and cold nights, the very dirt and wet, and all the seeming disadvantages of the Season (which probably may run in your Head, *Biophilus*) all make for our purpose. The Severities of the Weather which constrain us to lay aside other business, give us the more leisure to attend this; the short days are followed with long Evenings, which afford us opportunity to set things in order, to discourse together, and to instruct and animate one another in our intended Enterprize; and in the dark solitary Nights (our minds being then free from the
distrac-

*Winter and Old
Age are peculiar
Seasons for the bu-
siness of another
World.*

distraction of variety of Objects) our thoughts will run this way with wonderfull speed, if we do but direct them aright. So that (as *Philander* said) in truth we may so order it, as to make real progress towards our designed Port, even as we sit here.

Bioph. Nay, if *Philander* have such a Voucher, I know not what to say; but in earnest, I am somewhat too old and crazie to undertake the Journey.

Sebast. Nay, believe me, the older the better. An old Man, if he set to it in earnest, will outstrip all others in this Voyage; such Men will lose no time in trifles; experience hath taught them caution, and made them very wary of all diversions and impediments, and they have less clog of flesh and blood about them. In short, such Men are so sensible of the inconveniences of this our present Countrey, that it is great odds, but they will put on so vigorously, as to get to their Journey's end before the youngest of us all. Besides all which it is very considerable, that the older and more infirm any Man is, the more need he hath of the relief of that benign and wholesome air, and to be at rest in that quiet and peaceable Region of *Urania* *, whither we
 * See Conf. II. Pag. 125.
 are going.

Bioph. I see you are too many for me at this way of Drollery; but now that I know whereabouts you are, I must be forced to tell you plainly, that (though I very much esteem your Company) I am sorry you are fallen again upon this Romance of *Urania*: Is it not time to lay aside this new kind of Knight-Errantry.

Sebast.

Sebast. You may remember, *Biophilus*, (by what passed between us at our last meeting) that by *Urania* we mean nothing less than the *Kingdom of Heaven*; and by taking a Journey thither, we (consequently) intend nothing else than *Religion* and a devout prosecution of happiness in another World. Now therefore, if you will not be persuaded to bear us Company in the Expedition, yet can you find in your heart to reproach either the end or the means (as you seem to doe) the former under the contemptible name of a Romance, and the latter by that of Knight-Errantry.

What, in the Name of God, do you call

*The Vanity of
this World, and
Reality of that
which is to come.*

Realities, if these things be Romantic? As for the present World, it is notoriously a mere piece of Pageantry, and all the glory of it passes away in a vain shew; and if in it self it were not altogether so inconsiderable as experience shews it to be; yet humane life is so very short, that a Man can be little more than a Spectator of that Pomp as it passes by him. For by that time he begins to live, he more than begins to die. Either therefore there must be another Life and a World to come in reality, or else nothing at all is so, but all is Romance indeed.

Bioph. I cry you mercy, if I used an indecent Expression. I did not intend to given any offence, nor is it either my temper or custom to put affronts upon other Mens Persuasions; but I appeal to you, *Sebastian* (as a Man of Judgment) what name ought I to call that thing by, of which (when I hear Men talk confident-

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ly) I have notwithstanding neither any sense in my own Mind, nor see any rational ground to believe it.

Sebast. I acknowledge your Civility, good *Biophilus*, and in answer to your question, I tell you truly, that without any offence to me you may call that thing by what name you please, of which no rational account can be given (let Men talk as confidently of it as they will) provided you have taken full Information about it, and have so maturely and impartially considered of it, that you may be thought a competent Judge in the Case: But otherwise, let me tell you, you may happen to call some of the most certain truths in nature by some such opprobrious names; forasmuch as some very certain things may on the sudden, and at the first glimpse, seem not only mere Paradoxes, but utter Impossibilities; which yet afterwards, upon more deliberate inquiry, will abundantly confute that censure by their own evidence.

Serious Consideration necessary to Religion.

And even in sensible Perceptions, you know it is not sufficient that a Man have eyes in his head, but there must be a fit disposition of those eyes, a proper *medium* or well disposed air, convenient light, due distance of the Object, and competent time for our senses to survey and take hold of it, or else we shall make no true estimate of that which is presented to us. Now if you transferr this to Religion, and imitate the same care and caution in judging of that, you will doubtless be so far from concluding it to be a Romance, that you will find it not only recom-

recommended to you by the wisdom and experience of all the World, but agreeable to the reason of your own mind, and to the internal sense of your own Conscience. And which is more, you will observe the belief of those things whereupon it is founded to be so necessary, and of such moment and consequence, as that they will appear to be the very Pillars of the World, the Bond of humane Society, and the very things wherein your own nearest and most peculiar interest is involved; insomuch, that it will be utterly impossible that you should either live or die comfortably without an hearty persuasion of them.

Bioph. Now you speak like your self, and I understand you, but I hope I understand my self better than to be willing to be reputed an enemy to Civil Society, or much less to be an enemy to my self; let me therefore see those two things (which you last mentioned) clearly made out, and (without farther trouble to you) I shall think my self obliged to take new measures, or at least to make more diligent inquiry into this affair.

Sebast. Though I should have been right glad to have found you better resolved, and hoped that this present Conference should rather have been directed to the encouraging one another in our course, than spent in disputing our Port; yet in hopes that at length you will become a Votary for the *Holy-Land*, I will comply with your desires, and represent to you the evidence of those two things you insist upon.

And for the first, you will easily be sensible of the influence of Religion upon Civil Society,

ciety, when you consider how inconceivable it is, that mere external force or fear of humane punishment should be sufficient to keep the World in order, when (as it often happens) lewd and flagitious Men shall find themselves either secured from that danger by the secrecy of their Plots, or protected by their strength and multitude. And then you must acknowledge that to the ends aforesaid there is a necessity that some superiour power not only protect Governours from violence, but also strike the minds of Men with an awful Apprehension of them as his Favourites and Vicegerents; but this cannot be done but upon such Principles of Religion as we now speak of; therefore he that infringes that, weakens both Law and Government, and is an Enemy to Civil Society.

*The danger of ir-
religion to Civil
Society.*

Again, there can be no Obligation of Oaths, and consequently no security of Faith and Trust between Man and Man, but upon supposition of a God that takes notice of what Men doe, and who will call them to an account accordingly in another World: so that the Man who is destitute of these Persuasions, can neither give security of his Loyalty to his Prince, nor of Fidelity to his Friend or Neighbour, or any Man he deals with.

Bioph. Why, I pray you, *Sebastian*, may not Men trust one another upon the security of honour, good nature, or gratitude, or some such Obligation, without those fetters of Conscience which you speak of?

Sebast.

Sebast. Alas, alas, *Biophilus*, all those bonds which you mention are too weak to restrain the licentious humour of Mind ; they may put some little byass upon Mens Spirits, but they cannot bridle their Passions, curb their desire of revenge, nor prevail with them to deny their extravagant Interests and Inclinations, when they shall have an opportunity to gratifie any of them as we find by daily experience. For in all the Obligations (below Religion and Conscience) a Man is supposed to be accountable only to himself ; and therefore may dispense with himself, and acquit himself upon what terms he pleases. And therefore wise Men, and especially wise Princes, use not to trust to any of those defeisible Securities but only to that of Religion.

Bioph. Well, but have not Pretenders to Religion played fast and loose with Laws and Government, as well as other Men ? Nay, generally you shall observe, that a Bigotted sort of Men are the principal Conspirators and Actors of most of the Tumults and Disorders in the World.

Sebast. If I should object to you the daily and horrible Violations of Faith amongst the Pretenders to Honour, Ingenuity and Gratitude, I know you would answer me, That those Persons were not really Men of Honour, &c. but only Pretenders. And so you may answer your self in this case, namely, That they are but Pretenders to the real Principles of Religion, that falsifie their Faith and disturb Government.

Besides, if I should grant you, That the very Bonds of Religion are not able always to restrain the rage and folly of some exorbitant Persons; yet certainly it is the most powerfull means amongst Mankind to that end, and incomparably beyond all those you have named, for the sake of that reason I have already given you. And therefore (as I was about to say) you may remember, when upon occasion, *Ptolemy* King of *Egypt*, sent one *Theodorus*, in the quality of his Embassador, to *Lyfimachus*: this latter refuses to treat with him, or admit him under that Character, because he was reputed an Atheist; and being such, he looked upon him as a Person with whom there could be no security of civil intercourse.

Bioph. I remember the Story, but I pray you then (by the way) if *Lyfimachus's* Objection against *Theodorus* was sufficient, how came *Ptolemy* notwithstanding to trust him with the management of his affairs?

Sebast. Truly I can give you no other Answer, but that it seems he did not well understand the loose tenure of an Atheist, nor had so much prudence as his Neighbour. But let that pass, if you please, and give me leave in the next place to represent to you every Man's personal concern in the truth of Religion, which is such (as I intimated before) that no man can either live or die comfortably without it.

Bioph. Ay, with all my heart. Let Princes and States alone to manage their own matters. Shew me but that one Point you last mentioned, and it shall suffice in the present case.

B

Sebast.

Sebast. For that, *Biophilus*, you will easily apprehend, that no Man can die chearfully without the supports of Religion (I mean if he die sensibly, and with his wits about him) because the very best of such a Man's Game, and the summ of his expectations can be but this, That he shall die like the Beast, and that vital principle in him, which we call the Soul, shall be absolutely extinguish'd: so that he shall thenceforth as perfectly cease

Death very uncomfortable without the supports of Religion.

to be what he was, as if he had never been. Now this I suppose you will readily grant me, must needs be not only a very uncomfortable prospect, but such a condition as a man cannot think of without just abhorrence, nor be reconciled to, without as great a contradiction, as it were for him to be supposed to hate his own being, which surely is impossible.

Yet (as I said) this is the very best of the irreligious Man's case, and that which he can never be secure, will be the worst that shall befall him; for if it shall prove in the issue of things, that there is another World (and at least it may do so for ought he knows) then his case is so much worse, as that now by death he must enter upon an estate for ever, which he hath had no foresight of, nor made any preparations for. He encounters a God, whom he hath taken no care to propitiate towards himself in all the course of his life, by any Acts of Piety and Devotion, and what a dismal plunge must the approaches of Death (together with such a surprizal) of necessity put such a Man into?

Bioph.

Bioph. As for Death, I shall easily grant all you say, for that is no very comfortable thing at the best; the only refuge I know is, to make a vertue of necessity, and seeing die we must, to take it patiently: but for that reason I am resolved to live as long as I can, and as chearfully too, and why may not this be done without the business of Religion?

Sebast. In truth, *Biophilus*, the impossibility of living comfortably, without the helps of Religion, is every whit as evident as that of dying so, and for the very same reason, forasmuch as what

No Man can live comfortably, but upon the grounds of Religion.

soever renders Death terrible, must needs make Life uneasy too. For since Death is acknowledged to be unavoidable, it cannot chuse but run continually in such a Man's Head, Shortly I must die, and either everlastingly cease to be, or (which is far worse) begin to be eternally miserable: The least of which two things (without the miserable refuge of a perpetual Debauch to keep such a Man from thinking) must be of force enough to make his Heart ake, and to spoil all the pleasures of the present Life: Especially considering withal, the uncertainty of the tenure, and the innumerable accidents of humane Life; which last circumstance makes it to become just matter of fear at all times, that by some or other of those accidents of Mortality, his frail Thread may abruptly be broken; and consequently who knows but by to morrow, not only all his Projects and Contrivances, but all his Delights and Entertainments will suffer a total Interruption.

But then, if there be a God and another World (which he can never be sure that there is not) then he can expect nothing less than very suddenly to fall under the vengeance of that great majesty whom he hath always provoked and never appeased.

Besides all this, as we commonly observe, that Atheistical Persons are of all

*The causes of
the timorousness of
Atheists.*

Men the most timorous; so there is great reason for it, if we consider what a dark and melancholy thing it must needs be, for so impotent a Creature as Man is, to live in a World without a God, and without the security of a Providence; for there are a thousand things confessedly too strong for us, and which are able to crush and destroy us every moment. And in this case, where a Man hath no help in himself, if he have no Guardian about him neither, if (I say) he cannot look up to some higher Being as his Patron and Protector: it were mere madness to be Valiant: for all the grounds of Courage fail him, and therefore no wonder if his Spirits be broken and baffled by the danger of his Case, and the lonesomeness of his Condition.

Upon which account a Person of Honour, and a great Wit of this present Age, acknowledged some time before his Death; "That,

Late Earl of " although he for his part,
Rochester. " had no feeling of the com-
" forts of Religion, yet he
" accounted those to be hap-
" py Men that could and did live under the ad-
" vantage of it. For indeed, life is not life with
out

out those supports which that (and that only) affords us. But when a Man hath, by the benefit of that holy prudence, put all his interest into God's custody, and secured himself of another World, then he begins to live indeed, then he may laugh at the present World, despise temporal Life, and despise Death; forasmuch as thenceforth he is out of the reach of Chance, Fate, or Fortune.

Phil. 'Tis true, *Biophilus*, 'tis true, as *Sebastian* saith, the World to come is the only Reality, and Religion the only Comfort. O happy we that know there is a God in the World, under whose Providence we live! and blessed be that Divine Goodness, which hath provided another World to receive us, and there promised us eternal Life.

Philander ravished with the comforts of Religion.

O *Urania*, *Urania*, (Heaven I mean) thou end of Cares and Fears, and beginning of Joy without end! thou rest of Souls, and only satisfaction of great and wise minds! I am ravish'd with the thoughts of thee; I am so transported with hopes of thee, that I am become all Life and Spirit; methinks I begin to have Wings, and could fly to Heaven.

Bioph. Sebastian speaks shrewdly, I confess; but you, *Philander*, are too high a Flyer for me; you are so much in the Altitudes, that you must pardon me, if I a little suspect that you have (according to your former custom) been taking of a chearfull Cup, which as a wise Man observes, *Makes men speak all things by Talents*, 1 Esdr. 3. 21.

Phil. You are in the very right of it, *Biophilus*, I have taken a Dose, and a lusty one too (as

Sebastian will be my Witness) so that I find myself not a little elevated at this time. But, mistake me not, it is not with drink ; no (tho' I say it) I am grown a better Husband, and more frugal of my time, than to spend it on a Debauch : or (if you will) I am become a great Coward, and am afraid of an after-reckoning.

Bioph. What reckoning, Man ?

Phil. Nay, no other than that which *Sebastian* hath given us warning

The sin and danger of Drunkenness, and that the pleasures of it are false and delusory.

of, *the judgment to come.* For, I must tell you, I very much doubt whether God Almighty (who hath endowed us with noble Faculties, and thereby seems to have designed us for excellent Purposes, and who hath also appointed our time to be but short in this World) will take it well at our hands, that we should drown the one, and drive away the other in Sensuality.

Bioph. Now you grow serious, but what made you so brisk even now ? In truth I suspected you might have been bitten with your own Dog (as they say) and had prevented the Civility of my House by a liberal Glass at home.

Phil. O *Biophilus*, I thank God, I am come to that pass now, that I can dance without a Fiddle, and be merry without the aid of the Bottle ; and I look upon those Men to be in a very pitiable condition that cannot do so. For I have learned, by my former unhappy experience, that those *liquid Consolations* are mere cheats and palliative cures of Melancholy ; and tho' perhaps a man may by the help of them rid himself of the trouble of his own thoughts for the present

present (which is all that Wine can pretend to) yet he doth but reprieve himself for a time, and he will find himself again just where he was, as soon as he becomes sober; for Conscience is not to be totally drowned in Drink, nor the clamor thereof to be deaded by the noise of Huzza's.

Sebast. It is very true which *Philander* saith; for generally the Mirth of a Debauch, as it is strained and artificial, so it cannot last long: it is at best but like the effects of a strong Cordial, which may serve to rally the Spirits for some present encounter, but then they are spent in the Conflict, and fall and flag again quickly after; or like those mighty efforts which you shall observe some Persons to make in a Convulsion, the result of which will be, that such a Man shall become so much less than himself after the Fit, as he was more than himself whilst it was upon him: for any Man shall find, that whensoever the Spirits are extraordinarily exhilarated and dilated, they thereby become so thin and volatile, that they easily exhale and vanish, and so a Man becomes far more melancholy and lumpish after, than he was before.

But now in Intellectual delights and entertainments, wherein a Man may be merry and wise together, and so have no fear of an after-reckoning to pall the present Enjoyment, and especially in such Pleasures as come in upon the account of Religion, they afford a still and sedate delight, which refresh the Heart more than dilate the Countenance, and gently raise and strengthen the Spirits, but do not in any Measure exhaust them.

Bioph. You discourse ingeniously, *Sebastian*, but sure you have not mended the Matter: for it is as good to be drunk with Wine as with Conceitedness, which is the more lasting Distemper; and I pray let me see if you can excuse this transport of *Philander* from Fanaticism as well as from that which I at first suspected, for sure it must be one of them.

That religious Joy is not fanatical, & the nature of Fanaticism explained.

Sebast. Why, *Biophilus*, do you think a Man cannot be Chearfull, unless he be either Mad or Drunk?

Bioph. It seems then, in your opinion, Fanaticism is Madness.

Sebast. Truly, Sir, I profess to you, I take it to be little better; especially, if it be in any high Degree. For what (I pray you) is it to be Mad, but for a Man's Fancy or Passions so to get head of him, that he is hurried on wildly and extravagantly by such an unaccountable *impetus*, as that his Reason (the common Principle of Mankind) is not able to restrain or govern him? And on the other side, what is it for a man to fear without Danger, and to hope without Ground; to believe without Reason, and to think, and speak, or do such Things, whereof he can give no account which is intelligible by the rest of Mankind? This I take to be Fanaticism; and this is as plainly a Disease and a Fit of the Body, as those Convulsions which we spake of but now.

As for Example, If you shall observe a Man pretend to believe plain Impossibilities, and not only Supinely and Credulously swallow them, but confidently avouch and maintain them; it may

may be in regard of his Seriousness and good Meaning, you will call him an Enthusiast or Fanatick : Yet forasmuch as you are satisfied, that the Things he is so confident of, are Contradictions to the common Sense and Experience of Mankind (notwithstanding his Confidence and Devotion) you will conclude he is governed by other Principles than those of a Man, and consequently, that he is besides himself, and under some degree of Madness.

Again, When you see a Man, who can make no Pretence to any Character of publick Authority, nor can give any sufficient Proof of any special and extraordinary Commission from God Almighty, shall notwithstanding be acted by such a heady and intemperete Zeal, as to supersede the publick Magistrate, and take upon himself to govern and reform the World ; this indeed is Fanaticism, but it cannot be acquitted of some Spice of Madness withall.

Or lastly (to come more home to you) When a Man shall be perplexed with endless Scruples, and Fears and Doubts of the Danger and Damnableness of such Things as are manifestly the Violation of no Law, and shall be dejected in his Conscience, and ready to sink into Desperation ; at such Time as yet he is not conscious to himself of either omitting any known Duty, or committing any wicked Thing : Or on the other side, When such a Man shall run into the other Extream, and be transported with Joy, and ravished with Comfort ; but upon no more intelligible Grounds, than he had before for his Fears and Dejections of Spirit. Both these Cases may be very pitiable, but they are as well plain

plain Symptoms of a crazy Mind, as they are Instances of Fanaticism. But —

Bioph. I am very glad to hear these Things from you, *Sebastian*, and that you have so slight an Opinion of that Sort of Men, who make such a Figure, or rather such a Dust in the World.

Sebast. So far then we are agreed, but by your Favour, I believe all this which I have said will make nothing towards the Proof of your Charge against *Philander*; for though I impute Unreasonable and Extravagant Raptures to Fancy rather than to Faith, and account them rather a Distemper of the Body than the Devotion of the Mind; yet I must tell you after all, that True and Manly Religion is no cold and comfortless Thing, it is not a lukewarm Notionality, not a formal and bayardly round of Duties, not a dull *temperamentum ad pondus*, as they call it, but is lively, vigorous and sparkling, and hath its Joys and Raviishments too; only they are more sedate and governable, as well as more rational and accountable, than those we spake of before; and so I suppose you will find it to be with *Philander*: He hath express'd some heat, but not without light, and is both able to govern his Expressions, and to give you a sober Reason of them.

Phil. Hearty Thanks, dear *Sebastian*, for vindicating me from the mis-apprehensions my innocent joy had expos'd me to with *Biophilus*; and herein you have not only done me a kindness, but oblig'd all good Men, and done a right to true Piety it self, which is apt to be put out of Countenance with the Imputation

of

of Fanaticism, and so far it suffers thereby, that a great many well-disposed (but over-bashfull and timorous) Men are tempted to a very strange kind of Hypocrisie, and to pretend themselves worse than they are, and to trim it off in the indifferent strain of the World, for fear of incurring the Censure of being Zealots and Bigots in Religion.

*The true Grounds of
Comfort in Religion.* But now I shall take heart,
and adventure to let my
Light shine out abroad, as
well as burn within my

Breast. And I cannot forbear upon this occasion to return my most humble Thanks to God Almighty, who hath given me cause to hope in his Goodness, and the Cordial of that Hope, hath in some measure antidoted me against the Troubles and Vexations of this present World; for I profess to you, there is so much of Care and Fear, of Labour and Pain, of Sorrow and Disquiet here below, what by cross Accidents and Disappointments, what by the Malice of evil Men, or by the Follies, Peevishness, and Jealousies of weak and silly Men; that were it not for the Prospect of a better State of Things above, and of Rest and Peace, Stability and Satisfaction in another World, I should be very far from being fond of this present Life. But now when I consider and am satisfied, that at the worst I am under a Providence, so that nothing befalls by Chance, or by the mere Will of Man, but by Divine Appointment and Ordination; and consequently there is nothing but what he both can and will make to work for Good in the Conclusion:

And

And when withall I find my self resolved to submit to his wise Purposes, by which means it is in my Power to be wiser and better by all Occurrences; and in so doing, have my Hopes improved into some Measure of Assurance, that I shall in due time be translated into those happy Regions above. This comforts my Heart under all the present Inconveniencies, and not only supports my Spirits, but cheers them, and refreshes my very Countenance. And sometimes it happens, that the more the Vexations of the World had depress'd me, the higher do these Contemplations raise me; so that I break out into such an holy triumph and bravery, as that which you (*Biophilus*) took notice of in me since we came together.

Sebast. What think you now, *Biophilus*, is *Philander* Mad or Drunk?

Bioph. No, I acknowledge he speaks like a Man, or an Angel rather (if there were any such thing) but still I suspect there is some Trick or other in it; I cannot satisfy my self in these religious Braveries, as he calls them.

Sebast. Why, *Biophilus*, what is there to amuze you in this matter? Consider with your self, how can it be otherwise, but that he who is thoroughly satisfied that it is neither blind Chance, nor surly Fate, nor some Ill-natur'd and Unlucky Being; but contrary-wise, a Great and Wise and Good God, that governs the World: how can it be (I say) but that such a Man must needs be very Comfortable under such a Protection?

Or how can it come to pass that a Man that lives Virtuously and Piously, who approves him-
self

self to his own Reason and Conscience, and, as near as he can, to the Mind of that Great God, who made, and Governs the World, should be Tormented with pannick Fears of he knows not what ; since, whether he looks upward or downward, into himself or abroad, there is Nothing can hurt him: Nothing but what must needs cheer him with an hopefull expectation of a good issue of such a course in the upshot of things ; especially if with-

all he have a firm belief of
Eternal- Life in another
World, and of unspeakable
joy and felicity there at-

*The admirable and
unspeakable consolati-
on of believing Eter-
nal Life.*

tainable, and certainly to be enjoyed by him that pursues it in his life by such a course of Vertue and Piety as aforesaid. How can you imagine that such a man should be down in the mouth (as we say) or dull and out of Humour ? Nay, rather, how is it possible he should be able to smother such hopes, and conceal such joys ? No, they are too great to be kept secret in his bosom ; they will break out now and then in triumphant expressions.

Eternity, *Biophilus*, Eternal Life. (I mean) is so great, so glorious, so admirable an happiness, that I can never be perswaded that man really believes it, and hath any good measure of hopes that he shall attain it, who can be so reserved and Stoical, as to keep his countenance whenever he thinks of it.

Do but judge with your self, if you could have ground to believe you should never forgo this present life, but for ever enjoy your House, your Wife and Children, nor ever be parted from

from those wise and good Friends you have made choice of; that no Accident, no Disease, nor Malice of Men or evil Spirits could reach you; but you might pursue your Designs, and meet with nothing to interrupt the Train of your Thoughts and Projections, so that you could know Death only in Speculation; in this Case you may easily imagine, how much at ease a Man's Thoughts would be, how secure his Mind, how bold his Spirit, and how chearfull his Countenance. But now to live for ever in the Glories of the Kingdom of Heaven, to be not only secure from all Pain or Care, Fear or Danger, but to be in the Possession of perfect and consummate Bliss, to enjoy the Favour of God, the Presence of the ever-blessed *Jesus*, and the perpetual Society of all good Men made perfect, and free from their Ignorances, Errors, Passions and Infirmities. This is a State of Life that I protest I cannot think of without Astonishment, nor speak of without a Passion, nor hope for without a Rapture.

Bioph. I should easily consent to you in all this, *Sebastian*, if I thought it was real; for I am neither so fond of a Grave, as not to be desirous to live as long as it is possible, nor so severe to my self, as to be willing to want any of those Comforts of Life and Supports in Death that are attainable; but, in truth, I suspect all these great Things, *Philander*, that you talk of to be but pleasant Dreams, and the high rants of Fancy.

Sebast. But why should you think so, *Biophilus*, seeing it is very plain, that the soberest and best Men are of this Perswasion; and for the most

most part, the better the Men are, the more lively is their sense of these Things. Can you imagine that either God Almighty should put a Cheat upon the very Best of Mankind (and upon them especially ?) or can you think, that the Best of Men should be the greatest Lyars, and pretend to that of which they had no real Grounds ? I pray therefore be free with me, and tell me the Causes of your Mistrust in this Case.

Bioph. I think I have Reason to doubt these high Pretences to the wonderfull Comforts of Religion, in the first place ; because I observe the State of Mankind to be generally very uneasie and the World to be full of nothing more than Melancholy and Complaint, which sure could not be, if there were such effectual Remedies ready at Hand, and such an Hearts-ease in Religion.

Sebast. I will answer you in that presently, but I pray first tell me (by the way) what do you think is the reason that there are so many sickly and valetudinary People in the World ?

Bioph. Truly I think we may resolve the greatest part of those long and tedious Distempers, under which so many People languish, into Surfeits and other Instances of their own Riot and Luxury.

Sebast. Very well, but you do not yet reach my meaning ; I ask you therefore again, Do you not think that there are a great many amongst those that pine away under the afore-said lingering Distempers, who might possibly receive help and ease, if they took due care of themselves ?

Bioph.

Bioph. Yes doubtless, for in those chronical Diseases there is time for Advice and Application, and fit intermissions for Medicines to take place in; but the mischief is, some Men are humourfome and obstinate, and will take no Advice whatever comes of it: others deliver themselves up to Empiricks and unskilfull Persons, who often make the Disease worse than it was; and then there are some so soft and delicate, that although they have good Advice given them, and might be cured, yet will not follow the Rules that are prescribed to them.

Sebast. Very good, now you have saved me the labour, and have answered your own Ob-

The Causes of the Uncomfortableness of Mens Spirits generally.

jection against the real comfortableness of Religion: For there are the same three accounts to be assigned of the uncomfortableness of Mens Spirits, which you have given of the sickly Estate of their Bodies, *viz.*

In the first place there are some Men who fanfie themselves either too Wise to be advised, or think the Case of Humane Nature too desperate to be cured; and therefore grow Morose and Sceptical, and will rather cloak themselves up in a musty melancholy Reservedness for the present, and run the venture of all for the future, than give themselves the trouble of any serious thoughts of Religion. Now you cannot expect that these Men should find the Comfort of Religion, who were so far from making Experiment of it, that they were afraid of it, like those wise Men that for fear they should one time or other be poisoned, will therefore never eat any Meat.

Bioph.

Bioph. If you would pardon my interrupting of you, I could tell you for all this, that there are some certain Men in the World (though not many I confess) who enjoy themselves very well, and yet never were in Debt to any Religion for it.

Sebast. Very likely, *Biophilus*, for so as I remember, King *John* killed a very fat Stag that had never heard Mass in its Life; and so you shall see an Ox in the Stall, let him but have Meat, and Drink, and Ease enough, he never repines at the approach of the Day of Slaughter: In like manner there are a sort of dull unthinking Men, that pass away their time in a pleasant Dream of Sensuality, and never feel any want of the Consolations of Religion; but it is not because there is no need of them, but because such Persons do not feel the need, nor indeed are sensible of any thing else that is Manly and Generous.

*How it comes to pass
that some men seem to
live chearfully without
God and Religion.*

If I should tell you it was dangerous being upon such a Precipice, I suppose you would not think it a Confutation of my Caution to tell me, that notwithstanding a certain blind Man slept and snored securely upon it; for real Danger is Danger whether Men be apprehensive of it or no: or if you should observe a poor man to dream of Plenty, and all the Affluence of the World, you will not count him to be as happy as he that really enjoys those Things; a Dream is one thing, and real Felicity is another: and though the former fancies himself for the present as Happy as the other, yet I am
C sure

sure you, who know one is asleep and the other awake, do not think it to be so. Thus it is in Religion.

Bioph. Your pardon again; it is not only true that some stupid and incapable Persons are at hearts-ease without Religion, but you shall observe some of a better mold, polite and ingenious Men, live very pleasantly, and yet are not beholden to Religion for it.

Sebast. It may be so; but then I doubt they must be beholden to the Bottle for it, which they must ply continually too, to keep them from thinking: for I have shewed you already, that it is as impossible for a thinking Man (out of a Debauch, and who cannot but be sensible that he must die) to be Comfortable without the Aids of some Religion or other; as it is for you or me to caper and frolick upon the brink of such a Precipice as we spoke of but now. In short, such men as have Eyes in their Heads have no other Refuge, but to wink hard, that they may not be sensible of their Danger.

And so much for that. Now, if you please, I will proceed. In the second Place then there is (as you well observed) another sort of men, who, though they are not so refractory and contumacious as to defie the whole Art of Physick (as a perfect Cheat) yet out of Stinginess, or some other Folly, will apply themselves only to Quacks and Mountebanks, who, instead of curing their present Infirmities, by unskillfull Management, render them more dangerous and intolerable. So it is in this Case of Religion and the minds of men, there are those who do not abandon themselves to desperate Atheism,
nor

nor sceptically cast off all Care of Religion; but finding they cannot be at ease without some Regard of God, and Provision for another World; yet (not falling into the hands of those that were able to principle them right) entertain such imperfect and inconsistent Notions of Religion, as can really afford them no solid Consolation. And this is a second Cause why the World is so uncomfortable, notwithstanding all the relief that Religion pretends to give.

As for example, Suppose a man believes there is a God, yet if he look upon him under the Notion of a cruel and unrelenting Tyrant, governed by mere will, and who aims at nothing but the securing and greatning his own power, and consequently is so far unconcerned for any of his Creatures, that it is all one to him whether they be saved or damned eternally; you will easily grant me, that the Belief of such a God cannot be very comfortable, since a Man cannot think of him, nor much less exercise any act of Devotion towards him without Horrour and Affrightment.

*False Notions of
God and Religion
very uncomfortable.*

Or, again, Suppose a man should entertain a less horrid Notion of God, as that though he be not such a Monster as the former rendered him: yet that he is a nice and captious Deity, very teachy and hard to please, that would make no candid and equitable Interpretation, nor allow of Sincerity and good Meaning, but must have his mind to a tittle, and every thing must be done precisely according to Rule; and consequently, must needs be able to find fre-

quent occasions against his Creatures, and was likely as often to animadvert severely upon them. This must needs be a very uncomfortable Principle of Religion, as well as the former, since such a God is only the Object of Fear, and not of Love, and *all Fear bath Torment*, 1 John 4. 18.

Moreover, Put case a man should have a more kindly and benign Notion of God, than either of the former, but yet finds himself perfectly at a loss how to please the Divine Majesty, and propitiate him towards himself; in regard he knows of no Declaration of his Mind and Will, that he hath made (because he either never heard of, or doth not believe the Hcly Scriptures) it is impossible but that a devout Mind in this Case must be very much perplexed and uneasy; and the more devout the Man is, the more will his Perplexity be, in regard that when he hath done all he can to please God, he cannot rest satisfied, whether he hath served or disserved him all the while. Which in a great measure was the condition of the Gentile World, for lack of Divine Revelation; and therefore they were necessitated in their Devotions to make use of abundance of various Rites, in hopes, that if one sort of them missed, the other might hit to be acceptable to the Deity. And when all was done, they were not sure that either, or any of them, was perfectly agreeable to his mind: and therefore, as their Devotion must needs be superstitious in the nature of it; so consequently it must be attended with pannick Fears, and uncomfortable Apprehensions, as the Fruit of it.

Further-

Furthermore, Let us suppose a Man of so high an Attainment in Religion, as that he had some Intimations of the Divine Will, as to mater of Fact, but yet was under a Dispensation of Religion, which (at least in the letter of it) consisted mainly of sundry nice and curious Observances; such as the abstaining from such or such Meats; the performing such or such Rites and Ceremonies; of none of which he could give himself any rational Account, or be conscious of any other Obligation to them, but only, this is commanded, and thus it must be (which was the case of the superstitious *Jews*, as it is also of a sort of degenerate and Judaizing Christians) now it is plain that this State of Religion must needs be very uncomfortable also; because a man must of necessity drag on very heavily, where his reason doth not go before him, and his Judgment is not convinced of the Goodness and Excellency of those Observances, as well as of the Necessity of them.

Lastly, If a Man was under a Religion which could give him no assurance of any reward of his Devotion; but that for ought he knew he might at last have only his Labour for his Pain: Forasmuch as there was no way to assure him whether it should be his portion to rot for ever in the Grave, or whether after Death he should be transformed into some other Creature; or that though the Name and Memory of his good Actions should remain, yet his particular Person was to be swallowed up into the Womb of general Nature, and he for ever lost (such as which were the utmost hopes of the generality of the Blind Pagans.)

Now, I say, such Principles of Religion a this, or any of the aforementioned, must need be very uncomfortable; but all these, *Biophilus*, are as manifestly false, as they are sadly melancholy, and therefore it is not any defect in Religion that the Spirits of men are uncomfortable, but the default of those bad notions they have taken up, instead of the true Principles of Religion. And so much for that second sort of men.

Bioph. I am wonderfully pleased with this last Discourse of yours, in which you have not more demonstrated the uncomfortableness, than exposed the nonsense and absurdity of a great number of Religionists; and therefore so far I thank you. But then again, I must tell you, upon due consideration, it makes as much against your self as any of them, so far as concerns the point in hand between us. For after all that can be said, it is undeniable, that some men of very different persuasions, are as chearfull in their severall and respective ways, one as the other: now forasmuch as these cannot all be true, in regard they contradict each other; doth it not therefore follow from hence, that the comfortableness of Mens Spirits doth not depend merely upon Religion, but upon something else?

Sebast. In truth you follow me very close, yet I have two or three things

*The causes of the
comfortableness of
some mistaken Re-
ligion.*

to say, which I do not doubt will acquit me in what I have said, and I hope may satisfie you. First, It is to be considered, that a Man may be sound in his Principles

ples of Religion, and right for the main, who yet may differ from other men, and perhaps from the truth too, so much as to make him be reputed of a different Religion; yet notwithstanding those great Principles which he is found in, and that honest zeal he shews in the prosecution of them, will procure him acceptance with God, and enable him to live very comfortably; for fervent Devotion will cover a multitude of Errors, as well as *charity doth a multitude of sins*. And this is to be hoped is the condition of a great many well-meaning, but deluded People.

Again, Secondly, It is observable in this case, that many warm themselves *by sparks of their own kindling*, and are heated more by their own Motion, than by the Grounds and Causes of it: Zeal naturally warms the Blood, and whatsoever warms, in some measure comforts too; insomuch that some men of very rascally Opinions, and such as in the consequences of them, tend towards Hell, are yet raised up towards Heaven by the power of an active and heated Fancy.

But, after all, you must remember (what I said before) that Truth is Truth, and Dream is Dream; my meaning is, the Man of a mighty Zeal in his way, may seem to himself happy (whatever his Principles be) but it is only the man of sound Principles of Religion, that can be truly and understandingly and constantly comfortable.

And now I suppose I may come to the Third and Last sort of Men which disparage Religion (just as an unruly Patient discredits his Physi-

A wicked Life cannot be comfortable, if a Man's Religion be never so good.

cian) namely, those who tho' they have right notions of Religion, yet live carelessly, and are by no means answerable to their Principles in the conduct of their Lives.

Now it can be no wonder, nor any slander to Religion, that such men who live wickedly should be uncomfortable in their Spirits. For we may as well expect this cold Weather to warm our selves by a Gloe-worm, or a painted-Fire, as that any Man's Heart should be truly chearfull by the advantage of a Religion which consisted only in Notion, and was not vigorously practised. Nay it would be a wonder indeed if such a man should not be sadly melancholy, lying continually under the lashes of his own Conscience, for contradicting the very Principles of his own Mind. And this is so far from reflecting any dishonour upon Religion, that it is a mighty Vindication of the truth and power of it, when a man's own Heart shall revenge upon him his contempt of her Dictates and Sentiments; and certainly the better and more generous a man's Principles are (which he in this manner violates by a lewd Life) so much more sharp will be the stings of Conscience, and the uneasiness of his condition.

But now, take a man who to right Principles in his mind joyns a conformable Holy Life, and (as there is all the reason in the World for it, so) it is a thousand to one in experience, but he lives comfortably. And thus I think I have fully acquitted my self of your prime Objection

tion against the Comfortableness of Religion.

Bioph. I confess, *Sebastian*, you have spoke a great deal of reason, but yet perhaps you are not so clearly come off as you may imagine: for I have still to object, that many men of your Principles, and who (as it seems) in consequence of them, carry it sometimes with full sail of joy and courage, yet at other times are not able to maintain this tide, but flag, and are as much down by fits as other men; nay, do you not observe that there are men in the World, whose Principles I know you will allow, and withal whose lives you cannot blame, and yet these very men shall be remarkably uncomfortable, and no men fuller of complaints and more unease than they. Therefore it seems Religion is neither such a stable Principle of Comfort, nor such a *Panacea*, such a general remedy of the Troubles of humane Life, as is pretended: if you can reconcile this with your former assertions, I think I shall then be forced to yield you the Cause.

Sebast. It is true which you observe, That sometimes those that seem to have all the advantages of Religion, are notwithstanding uncomfortable under them, and yet this may be no impeachment either of the truth, or of the efficacy of those Principles. For this which you speak of may come to pass upon several other accounts; as, namely,

How it may happen that pious men may be uncomfortable.

In the first place, it may be that he, in whose whole course of life we can observe no blemish, may notwithstanding be justly charged by his own

own Conscience for several such miscarriages as may well make him uneasy till he hath made his Peace with God and himself again, by hearty Repentance and Reformation. Now you must not impute this to the defect of Consolation in the Principles of Religion, but to the man's own defect of Piety. For whensoever we see a Man troubled for violating the Rules of his Religion, we have a kind of sensible experiment of the great reality and mighty power of it; and this may happen, though you see not the causes of it.

Again, It may be the Person who now lives very vertuously, and consequently might live comfortably upon the Principles of Religion, hath formerly been a great sinner: and now, though his Repentance hath made his Peace with God, and so there is nothing justly to interrupt his Comfort; yet as often as he reflects upon the hainousness of his former miscarriages, no wonder if the briskness of his Spirit be abated, if it be but by the Consideration of the Danger he hath escaped.

Again, It may happen that he who is not indeed conscious to himself of any guilt which should deject his confidence towards God; yet by the malicious artifice of the great Enemy of Mankind, may have such black and frightfull fancies raised in his head, as may very much discompose him for the present, till by Prayer and Application to the Grace of God he overcomes them.

Moreover sometimes, when all is well within, and a Man's own Heart doth not accuse him, yet it may happen that outward afflictions may
be

be so vexatious, so sharp and pinching to him, that for a time even a good Man's Spirits may be disordered by them, till he recollect himself, *and Sampson like, shake off those Philistims that are upon him*; I mean untill he rally the forces of his Reason, or rather till by faith he take Sanctuary, in the impregnable Fortrefs of Conscience and Religion, and there he securely weathers out the storm, and all becomes quickly serene and calm again.

But after all that is or can be said, allowance must still be made for an unhappy temper of Body: for it must be remembred that Religion is a Medicine for the Soul or Mind, and not for Bodily Diseases. You know the intimate correspondence and quick sympathy between those two Inmates, Soul and Body, which is such, that like *Hippocrates's Twins*, they mutually affect one another, so that one of them cannot well enjoy it self, if the other be in disorder. Do but consider how exceeding difficult it is to maintain the rate of a man's common conversation, and especially to bear up to any measure of brisk airyness, when the body is but a little sickly and discomposed. And then how can you imagine but that there will be an unevenness of temper in a melancholy Man's deportment, notwithstanding that the comforts of Religion should be as solid and stable as I have represented them to be?

Bioph. But by your leave, Sir, I understood you that there was such a Catholick and Paramount Antidote of all sorrow to be found in Religion, that your pious Man could never have been sad any more (like the Chimæra of a wise
Man

man amongst the Stoicks) neither outward Accidents could discompose him, nor bodily Infirmities interrupt his tranquillity and self-enjoyments.

Sebast. Sure *Biophilus*, you did not think I

The unhappy influence of a melancholy Body upon the Mind.

took every good man to become a God Almighty, or the powers of Religion to be so omnipotent, [as that because they can recreate a man's Spirits, they should therefore also make him intirely another Creature. You might as well imagine I asserted that this spiritual remedy should preserve men from dying, as from being sick or melancholy, when their Constitution is prone to it. For although by reason of the near relation between Soul and Body (as I said before) it is not to be doubted, but that the comforts of the Mind upon account of Religion, may, in a good measure, cheer the bodily Spirits, yet, on the other side, it is to be expected that the Body will have its influence reciprocally; and when it is infirm, will depress and clog the Mind that it shall be sure to be sensible of the burthen and be able to move the less briskly in its course. In short, the business between the Soul and Body stands thus; namely, as, on the one hand, the Body can affect the Mind so far as to retard its motion, and check its flight; but not so as altogether to oppose and hinder them: so, on the other hand, the Mind (if that be comfortable) comforts and refreshes the bodily Spirits, but is not able entirely to alter them: For Temper will be Temper, and Melancholy will be Melancholy still.

That

That therefore which I assert and have hitherto endeavoured to prove, and that which the common experience of pious men attests, is no more but this, That there are never-failing Springs of Consolation in Religion, provided the issues of them be not obstructed by some or other of the aforesaid occasions.

Phil. I know, *Sebastian*, you have well considered all that which you have said, and I thank God I have some experience of the truth of it for the most part; and therefore have reason to rely upon your Judgment for the rest. But yet there is one thing runs in my thoughts, concerning which I would gladly ask your opinion, if I do not unseasonably interrupt your discourse with *Biophilus*.

Sebast. You will not interrupt me, *Philander*, for I was at a full period; or if it was otherwise, we would make a Parenthesis for your satisfaction: What is it therefore wherein I can serve you?

Phil. The matter, in short then, is this: I have observed several Divines, amongst the causes of perplexity and uncomfortableness of good men, to reckon one, of which you have hitherto taken no notice; namely, *the case of Desertion*, which they define to be, "When

" God withdraws himself ar-

" bitrarily from such persons

" for a time, and hides his

" Face from them upon the

" sole account of his Preroga-

" tive, or for some reason best

" known to himself, but without the least guilt

" or provocation on their parts. Now if this

be

*The unreasonable-
ness of a commonly
received opinion
concerning God's
deserting of good
Men.*

be true, it may then not only happen that the very best, and also the most sanguine and chearfull men naturally may be very uncomfortable; but the very state of Spiritual comfort will be very uncertain and fluctuating; and, which is worst of all, there will be a disease without a Remedy, a case that admits of no Consolation. For what can all counsels and discourses, or all the Exercises of Faith or Reason avail against a peremptory Act of God?

Sebast. It is very true, *Philander*, as you observe, there hath been such a Notion broached, and the effects and consequences have been bad enough; For besides what you have well alledg-

The absurd consequences of that Opinion.

ed, under the pretence hereof, some have been so abused as to indulge their own humour, and, as *Jonas* said, *he did well to be angry*, so they fanſie, they ought to be melancholy, when God (as they imagine) sets himself against them, and they thereby are tempted to think hardly of the Divine Majesty, as if he was a great Tyrant who took pleasure in the complaints of his Creatures; and which is worse than that (if worse can be) sometimes evil men get this Notion by the end, and then whensoever their wicked lives render their consciencies uneasy to them, they presently conceit it may be only the withdrawing of the Divine Favour from them, and how can they help it, since it is the case of good men to be so dealt with?

The groundlessness of the aforesaid Opinion.

But what ground there is for all this I cannot imagine. It is true, we ought not to dispute

pute the Divine Prerogative, or what he may do if he pleases. For we find it dangerous to take upon us to limit the Prerogative of earthly Princes; and if they may have reasons for such things as we do not understand, much more hath God, whose wisdom is infinite and unsearchable: therefore not to define what God may or may not do, it is plain that there is no foundation in holy Scripture (which is the Declaration of his Will) to think he will take such a course as this case supposes; and besides, it seems inconsistent with his sincerity and goodness, and can by no means be reconciled with that settled and immovable delight he declares himself to take in good men, that he should play fast and loose with them, or (as some have rudely express'd it) play at bo-peep with his Children.

No, *Philander*, assure your self, infinite Goodness will not disguise it self, and put on a frightfull Vizard merely to scare his weak and timorous Children; so far from it, that contrariwise so long as men continue Constant, Loyal and Dutifull towards him, he will be unchangeable in his favour, and constantly shine out upon them in the bright beams of love and kindness. And if it shall happen that (as I granted to *Biophilus*) the melancholy of men's Constitution shall rise up in such black fumes, as not only to cloud their Minds, but that (consequently thereof) they may entertain dismal Apprehensions of him; yet against all this he is ready to relieve them by his Providence, and to assist and comfort them by his holy Spirit, if he be devoutly applied to: but to be sure he will never exasperate the condition of a sincerely good man

,by

by any unprovoked act of his own. He hath told us, *He will not break a bruised reed, nor quench smoking flax*, Matth. 12. 20. And that, *if men draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to them*, James 4. 8. and he neither needs it, nor is inclined to try experiments upon poor melancholy men. Let us have a care therefore of charging the effects of our own changeable humour (either of Body or Mind) upon the unchangeable God. For so long as we walk by the Light of his Word, we may live under the Light of his Countenance, if (at least) our own Melancholy interpose not, and eclipse it to us: and (bating outward troubles) we may upon those terms, in a good measure enjoy Heaven upon Earth; we may be as bold as Lions, as chearfull as Angels, in a word, as full of joy as our Hearts can hold: For the Principles of Religion will beat all this out, and God will never interrupt the efficacy of them.

Phil. Oh Blessed! For ever blessed be the Divine Goodness, and God's Blessing on your Heart, *Sebastian*, for the good report and assurance you have given us of it. And now, Friends,

*An Holy Triumph
in Contemplation of
the comfort of true
Religion.*

why should not we be very good, that we may be thus comfortable? And why should we not be comfortable if we be good? Why should the Jolly Fellows out-do us, whose Hearts are filled with Froth, and their Heads with Steam, and we that (if we be as we pretend to be) have God, and Conscience, and Heaven on our sides, hang down our Heads and Hands, and by so doing reproach our God, our Religion, and our selves too?

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Have not we such Notions of a God, as render him a just and a *faithful Creator*, a wise and benign Being, that is tender of, and exorable towards his *Creatures*: How then can we chuse but love him, and delight in him?

Hath not his Divine Majesty made his mind so well known to us that we cannot be to seek what will please him, but may go on chearfully in the course of our Duty without Distrust or Scruple? And can we doubt his constancy to himself, and to that Declaration he hath made of his Will, that we should suspect the end if we use the means; since we may read our own destiny before hand, and anticipate the Sentence of the great Day of Judgment? Are not all his Laws so just and rational, that they agree with the very sense of our own Mind, so that *his Service is perfect Freedom*? Forasmuch as in a very proper sense we are governed by our own Laws, those of the Gospel being enacted in our own Consciences.

And are we not satisfied that we shall be so far from losing our labour in Religion, that we have the fullest assurance (such a thing is capable of) that in reward of faithfull serving God in this Life, we shall after Death be raised up again, and live for ever and ever with him in his Kingdom of Heaven? Surely all this together is sufficient to make us fervent and hearty in the exercise of Religion, and comfortable in our Spirits when we have so done.

Sebast. Bravely resolved, *Philander*, this pace (if you hold it) will bring you to *Urania* presently. But I will bear you company if I can; and therefore I add to what you have said, why

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should

should we be afraid to be alone, or in the dark, since we believe God is every-where, and in the greatest solitude will afford us the comfortable effects of his Presence and Providence? or why should we be under dreadful apprehensions of the power and malicious enterprizes of evil Spirits upon us, seeing we are convinced *that greater is he that is with us, than he that is in the world?*

Why should we be dejected at worldly losses, or miscarriages in our temporal affairs, when we know that *in Heaven we have a more enduring Substance?*

Why should we be dismay'd at the infliction of any Pain or Torture upon our Bodies, either by the Hand of God in a violent disease, or by the cruelty of men that hate and persecute us: since God hath promised *that no temptation shall overtake us, but what we shall be able to bear?* that is, he both can, and will either abate the torments, or support us under them.

In a word, What need we be afraid of death it self, since *it cannot kill the Soul*, and is no more but only a dark passage to a Kingdom of light and glory——

Bioph. You talk bravely, Gentlemen, but I protest I am amazed at you: for to this very day I never looked upon Religion as any other than an austere and melancholy course of life, and the most undesirable thing in the whole World.

Phil. For God's sake then, *Biophilus*, what is comfortable, if Religion be melancholy? Is the World so very comfortable, when you know it is full of nothing but care and folly, vexation and disappointment? Is Sin so comfortable, which (after the Commission of it) perpetually
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dogs a Man with guilt, and ordinarily blemishes his Credit, disorders his Fortunes, impairs his Health, and crows and debases his Spirit? Or is Death so comfortable a thing, which represents to a Man nothing but an horrible pit of Darkness, and the Land of Oblivion.

If Religion be not comfortable nothing is, and Mankind is a sad and deplorable Creature.

What (I say) then can be comfortable, if that be not so, which is the only remedy against all the former? for it is plain, that nothing but the hopes of another and better World at last can enable a Man to enjoy himself tolerably in this present: Nothing but living vertuously for the time to come, can repair the mischief of sins formerly committed: and nothing but Eternal Life is a sufficient antidote against the fears of Death: and all these are the effects and benefits of Religion. Therefore if this be uncomfortable, Mankind must needs be the most deplorably unhappy kind of Being in the whole World. For though other Creatures are in some sort fellow-sufferers in the common Calamity of this World; yet besides that their share is ordinarily not so great as his, it is evident that they fear nothing for the future, but only feel the present evil, and they have no restraint upon them from what they desire, nor no remorse for what they have done; therefore if Mankind have not the glory of his Conscience when he doth well, to set against the checks and girds of it when he doth amiss; and if he have not hopes to counter-balance his fears, and a reward hereafter for his self-denial at present, his condition is far the worst of any Creature in the World.

Therefore, as I said, Religion is his peculiar concern, and singular advantage, as that which only can repair all his misfortunes.

Sebast. But I pray, *Biophilus*, what do you apprehend in Religion that can make it look so melancholy to you? *Is it because* it sets a God before you, than which nothing can be more desireable? for *God is love, is rich in goodness*, nay goodness it self; inso much, that if it were possible any thing in the Universe should be more good than he, that would be God. He made Man, preserves him, loves him, delights in him, designs him to live eternally with himself. In a word, all imaginable comfort is so wrapp'd up in this one word, *God*, that I remember a

brave Heathen said, *He would not be willing to live a day in the World, if he thought there was not a God in it.*

It may be, you will say, this God is Just and Holy, and jealous of his Honour, and will revenge himself upon stubborn and incorrigible

*The great truths of Religion vindicated from the imputation of uncomfor-
tability.*

Sinners; all this is true, but what need you be one of those that provoke him; and then, the juster and holier he is, the better and more comfortable it is for you; or if you have offended him heretofore, yet if you repent and turn to him, he is so exorable and pitifull, that no tender parent hath more yearning Bowels, or more open Arms, to receive his Prodigal and lost Son returning home to him, than God hath towards penitent Sinners.

Will you object the self-denials required by Religion, as that a Man must restrain himself for God's sake of many things that are pleasant to Flesh and Blood? It is true there are such things required, but they are not so many as that a Man may not live very pleasantly notwithstanding; and if they were more than they are, who would not comply with them to obtain the favour of such a God, and to gain Eternal Life upon those terms?

I am sure you cannot object against the direct and positive duties of Religion, such as Prayers and Praises to God, reading and meditating on his Word, or Acts of Beneficence and Charity towards Mankind; for there is nothing more pleasant and entertaining, nothing more delicious than these, if they be rightly understood. So that in short, it is no better than a mere slander to call Religion uncomfortable, and such as could proceed from nothing but the Devil himself; or if from Men, it must be such as had never tried it, nor were resolved ever to do so.

Bioph. You must pardon me, Gentlemen, I tell you plainly I never felt any of these Comforts of Religion which you speak of.

Phil. I, there's the business, now you have said all, here lies the bottom of all the scandalous reports of Religion, as if it was a sower, melancholy thing. Try it, *Biophilus*, and you will quickly confute your self, experience will do it for you; you used to say, Seeing is believing; now, in God's Name, make experiment, *Taste and see how good the Lord is*; and let me tell you this for your encouragement, there were never yet any who effectually made the experi-

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ment and were disappointed. A great many who slighted Religion for a great while, at last have become sensible of their folly, and made their refuge in it; but it is very rare, and next to impossible, to find any who in earnest applied themselves to it, that ever apostatized from it, or pretended they were disappointed of Comfort in it.

Bioph. But, for God's sake, what do you mean by trying? What would you have me do? I should be very glad to live comfortably.

Phil. By trying, we mean no more but this:

*The true method
of experimenting
the comforts of Re-
ligion.*

You must apply your self in earnest to the knowledge and practice of Religion, the very first step to which is gravity and seriousness of Spirit. It was, I remember, the short and weighty Counsel of the Great *Hugo Grotius*, when he lay on his Death-bed, to some about him, who asked his advice, *Be serious*, said he, and your work is half done: leave off tricks of wit and captious Evasions; do not please your self in a trifling pretence to extraordinary sagacity in finding flaws in so weighty a concern as this we speak of; but be willing to believe, and then (as I said) resolve to live up to the convictions of your Conscience, and you will, in due time, find the comfort of so doing.

You do not expect to feel the warmth of the Fire, this cold Season, unless you draw near to it, and continue by it; no more reasonably can you expect to feel the Comforts of Religion, till you have embraced the Doctrines, and at least begun to live by the laws of it: but when

you

you have so done, from thenceforth you will begin to be sensible of what we have discoursed, and according to your progress, such will be the proportion of your comfort, and persevering in your course you will every day find your self drawing nearer and nearer to Heaven; is it not so, *Sebastian*?

Sebast. True to a tittle, *Philander*, and so you *Biophilus*, will find it, if you (as I hope you will) make the experiment; for though (as our good Friend here hath well observed) the joys of Religion come in gradually, and not all at once; yet, like the rising Sun, they are always growing higher and higher to a perfect Day of Glory, and (therein unlike to that) never more setting or shutting in upon us in a total darkness again; as soon as you set your Face towards Heaven, and begin to live conscientiously, you shall find your mind easie, and your Spirits cheared with an admirable serenity; and when in consequence of such beginning, you worship God devoutly, you will find a comfort in his Presence, and a sweet sense of him when you have finished your duty; thence you will proceed to feel a motion of bravery in your mind to resist all kind of sin, and that will be followed with an unspeakable Pleasure and Glory in Victory over your Passions and corrupt Inclinations; and thence forward Religion will grow easie and delightfull to you, and you shall be able to look towards the other World with hope and desire; and then finally the holy Spirit will come into your Soul, and seal you to the day of Redemption, and give you such a relish of the Glories above, that you shall despise the present

World, and be able to look through the dark Vault of Death, and take a view of Heaven.

Bioph. Whatever the matter is, you two are able to ravish any Man's Heart with this Discourse, I am sure you have filled me with admiration, you have astonished me. But I pray what Religion must a Man be of, that he may make this experiment?

Sebast. Nay, sure enough it must be *the Old Religion*, or you will lose your

*The Old Religion
is the only comfortable Religion.*

labour. All Newfangles are mere cheats; they may serve Men to talk of, and make a noise with in the World, but they will never afford sound comfort in a Man's need: so far from it, that they distract a Man with Novelty, and fill his Head with endless scrupulosity. The way to Peace of Conscience, and Spiritual Joy, is not to be of such an Opinion, Sect, or Party, or to be zealous of such a Mode or Ceremony; but to have a firm Faith in God, to live an holy and devout Life, this is the Old Religion truly so called, for it is as old as Gospel it self, and consequently is the tried way to solid Consolation. But I pray, upon this occasion, give me leave to ask you a bold Question, What Religion are you of at present?

Bioph. It is a free Question, I confess; but, (knowing whom I am amongst) I will give you as free an Answer: truly *Sebastian*, I am of no Religion, at all, that I know of, unless you make me to be of one.

Phil. Then I do not wonder that you are such a Stranger to the comforts of Religion, for it seems all was Romance to you (as you call'd it)

it) but I hope, however, you do not look upon it as a modish Qualification, and a piece of Gallantry to be without Religion; take heed of that, good *Biophilus*, for *God will not be mocked*.

Bioph. You see I do not, *Philander*, but I know, on the other side, you would not have me dissemble, and play the Hypocrite neither; and therefore I have told you the very truth.

Phil. You do very well in both those particulars, but it's pity you should not find out a middle between Scepticism and Hypocrisie, which you have now a fair opportunity to do; being in the company of *Sebastian*, if you please to make use of it.

Sebast. In earnest, *Biophilus*, you are one of the strangest Men in the World, if this be true which you say of your self; I pray give me leave to enquire how you came to be in this condition? I am confident you have not drown-
Several occasions of Mens being irreligious.

ed your Religion in drink, (as some have done) for I take you to be a wiser man, and more carefull of your Life and Health; and I am as confident that you have not carelessly lost it in your Travels in Foreign Countries, as some young Gentlemen have done. What then! hath the Hypocrisie of some high Pretenders (who either ridiculously over-acting their parts, or lewdly prostituting Religion to base and villainous designs) made you ashamed of it? or (which hath been very common in this Age) have you run a wild round through all Opinions, till at last, being come about to the very Point you set out from, you thenceforth concluded
with

with your self according to the Proverb, *As good never a whit, as never the better !*

Bioph. You are very ingenious in your gueſſes, *Sebastian*, but all in vain ; for you can never find what was never loſt, nor can I have loſt what I never had. I tell you again, I neither have, nor ever had any Religion that I know of.

Phil. You might well have ſpared thoſe laſt words, *Biophilus* ; for I will undertake for you, you have no Religion indeed, if you do *not know of it*. Religion is not like a Diſeaſe, to be catch'd before we are aware, nor can it be impoſed upon us without our conſent and privy : beſides, it is ſo active and vigorous a Principle, that it will diſcover it ſelf, and a Man may as well carry Fire in his Boſom, and not be burnt, as carry Religion in his Heart, and not be ſenſible of it.

Sebaſt. You mightily increaſe my wonder ; I am at a loſs how this could come to paſs : did you grow, like a Muſhrom, out of the Earth ? Or what was the manner of your Education ?

Bioph. My Birth, *Sebastian*,
Ill Education. was, I ſuppoſe, like other
 Mens, but, perhaps, my Breed-
 ing might have ſomething peculiar in it. For a-
 mongſt other things, that happened to me, it
 fell out that one of thoſe Perſons, who ſhould
 eſpecially have taken care of my Inſtitution be-
 ing a great Fanatick, was ſtrongly of the Opi-
 nion, that the Spirit of God (as his Phraſe was)
 muſt immediately, and by himſelf, effect all the
 good that is in any Man ; and therefore he con-
 cluded it would not only be loſt labour, but a
 Derogation from the Grace of God, to make
 uſe

use of any means, or to be much concerned about my Education. And then for the rest of them to whom I was committed in my minority, they were great Politicians, and pretended they should consult my Interest most by keeping me dis-engaged from any Party in Religion, that so I might be always at liberty to joyn myself with that which should prove most to my temporal advantage.

Phil. Shrewdly projected on both parts, in-somuch that it is hard to say whether the Divinity of the former, or the Politicks of the latter be the more wonderfull.

Sebast. Here was a beginning bad enough, I confess, but then when you grew a Man, and became at your own dispose, what kept you un-resolv'd in this great Affair?

Bioph. For that, I must tell you, that my setting out in the World fell about the late times of publick Distraction, and then I observed there were so many Religions, that it was not easie to resolve which to chuse, and upon that account I continued Neuter still.

Sebast. Nay, *Biophilus*, there you were wanting to your self, as much as your Guardians had been wanting to you before; for the more Disputes concerning Religion there are in the World, it is far the greater probability that there is at least some general truth amongst them, though many of the particulars must needs be mistaken: besides, if you had considered that matter diligently, you would have found that few, or none of those disputes were about the Fundamentals of Religion, but only about certain Notions, or Modes and Forms, and you might

might have abstracted from them, and been a good Christian nevertheless.

Bioph. It may be so, and, I confess, I had sometimes such thoughts, but then whenever I began to look that way, there were those brisk young Men about me, that, observing me to

All Company betrays men to Atheism.

grow a little serious, would preach to me at this rate; What, *Biophilus*, do you grow weary of your Liberty? Do

you not know there are bonds in Religion, as well as in Matrimony? Are you not aware how it restrains the Pleasures of Life, and damps all jollity? if once you let loose that thing call'd Conscience, it will cost you a great deal of Art and Pains to hamper it again, and subdue it to your Interests. Do but observe (say they) that whensoever any man comes under the power of Religion, it abates his Courage and Bravery, and renders him tame and sheepish, liable to be affronted by every body. In a word, said they, all that which they call the fear of God, and concern for another World, is nothing but either the effect of Ignorance, Pedantry, or Hypocrisie; but to make our selves merry with both, is true Wit and Gallantry.

Phil. Lord, what pity it is that such Men as you speak of were not condemned to wear Fools Coats, or that they have not some mark set upon them, that men might avoid them as Lepers, or men infected with some such loathsome and contagious Disease. I pray, Sir, what Opinion had you of that sort of Men and the preachments they made?

Bioph.

Bioph. To tell you the truth, I had not much better conceit of them my self, than you have; for though they pretend to Wit, yet it is little more than impudence and scurrility; and, besides that, they are rude towards the most general persuasion of Mankind; I observe withal, that the greatest talkers, at that rate, are commonly Men that not only prostitute their Reputation, but squander away their Estate, their Health and Lives also with such incogitancy and prodigious folly, that I can by no means think their Judgment is to be relied upon in any serious matter; yet I must needs say something fluck with me by the frequent Harangues and Conversation of such Men.

*The rudeness
and barbarity of
Atheists.*

Phil. I am in great hopes of you, *Biophilus*, that you will come over to us, now you betray the secrets of Atheism. You have revealed the very *Mystery of Iniquity*; 'tis liberty to be lewd and wicked, and perfect licentiousness that is the secret root and cause of Atheism, and Men of a profligate sense and debauched tempers, are the principal Advocates for it, and the sworn Enemies to Religion, as indeed they are to every thing that is serious.

Sebast. *Biophilus* speaks like a Man of sense and ingenuity, and give me leave to say, Sir, I cannot tell whether I ought more to applaud the sagacity of your mind, or to deplore the unhappiness of your Education and Acquaintance; it is a thousand pities the former should lie under the fatal prejudices of the latter. And I should account nothing to have befallen me in my whole Life more lucky or desirable, than an opportunity

nity of rescuing such a temper from such a calamity. But, I pray, with the same ingenuity you have hitherto express'd, tell me, have you gone away currantly with this incuriousness or unconcernedness for Religion? have you not sometimes had conflicts within your self upon the point we are upon?

*The irreligious
man's conflict with
himself.*

Bioph. I confess I have; for sometimes, whenas I could not but observe this business of Religion to be the great Theme of the World, I mean to be that which the generality of Mankind are very busie and sollicitous about (for I can call to mind but very few who have not in some sort or other pretended to it) and I take notice also, that most of the sharpest disputes and hottest contests are raised about it; surely then (thought I) these Men are in earnest, and believe themselves in this affair, and then why should I make the adventure alone? it may become me in prudence to have some concern about it too: especially when I considered and saw plainly that by the course of all the World I must shortly die; and forasmuch as it was impossible for me to be certain what might or might not come afterwards, and what strange Revolutions might succeed my going off the Stage of this World, within the compass of that vast tract of time which I was likely to leave behind me. Hereupon methought it became me in discretion to provide for the worst. To all which I must add, That I have at several times had unaccountable qualms and mis-givings of Heart (upon some of the foregoing Considerations, or something of that nature)

ture) which not a little startled me for the present; but then I endeavoured to check them as the effects of Melancholy and mere Panick Fears, notwithstanding, in spite of my Heart, they would return upon me, and gave me suspicion that they might have some other ground than I was aware of.

Sebast. Well, and would not these things prevail upon you to lay aside your neutrality, and determine you to a serious Consideration of Religion?

Bioph. No truly, they did not, for I had other thoughts came into my mind, which seemed to counter-balance the former, and brought me to an *equilibrium*, or to hang in such a suspense as you now find me in; for I suspected my suspicions, and fell in doubt whether those odd kind of bodings and presages of my own Mind, which I told you of, concerning God and a future State, might not proceed from the mere weakness and timidity of Humane Nature, or from Ignorance, Melancholy, or natural Superstition, without any just and reasonable Foundation. And then as for those apprehensions of Religion, which I observed to be generally in other Men, I therein suspected the Arts of cunning Men and State-Politicians, who might possibly have designs to over-reach others into those Persuasions which they had no sense of themselves. Upon such Considerations as these, I was inclined on the other side, not to give my self any trouble about that which seemed so dark and uncertain.

Sebast.

*Devotion towards
God is neither the
effect of Ignorance,
Cowardice, Super-
stition, &c. but
hath real and rati-
onal grounds.*

Sebast. I pity you with all my Heart, *Biophilus*, and yet my wonder is almost equal to my pity, that a Man of your sagacity should be staggered by such groundless Fancies; and withal, I cannot but hope that your second thoughts will easily assail you in this case. For in the first place, you cannot but have observed that many of the shrewdest Men in the World, are as much under an awfull sense of Religion, as the most easie and injudicious. Nay, ordinarily, the more throughly learned and wise any Men are, the more hearty and earnest they are in this affair. From whence you cannot (without doing violence to your discretion) but conclude, that Religion and Devotion are far from being the mere effects of ignorance and imposture; whatever some shatter-brain'd and bebauch'd Persons would fain persuade themselves and others.

And then in the second place, when you consider that the most brave and courageous do as well take sanctuary in Religion, and imbrace it as ardently as the most timorous and cowardly; you will have no more reason to impute the rise of Piety to pusillanimity or superstitious fears, than you had before to charge it upon folly and ignorance, or the cheats of Politicians, but must be forced to conclude this great business to be more deeply founded, and to depend upon higher Causes.

Bioph. You say well, Sir, and I should be apt to think so too, if I could learn what those higher Causes and deep Foundations are, which
you

you speak of ; and herein I would gladly have your advice, who (as I am perswaded) have too great a judgment to be led away with popular errors, and (I am confident) whose integrity is such as will not suffer you to be accessory to the imposing upon me. Tell me therefore, I beseech you, into what real causes I ought to resolve, either those private Impressions of Religion I have found in my self, or those more publick effects of it, which I have observed in others.

Sebast. Play the Man, *Biophilus*, and judge with your self, into what causes should you, or can you resolve such effects, but those that are as real and substantial as the effects themselves ; namely, the plain reasonableness of that thing (called Religion) approving it self both to the inward sense of your own mind, and to humane nature in general ; that is to say, there is first a natural impress of Religion, which God hath left upon the Consciences of Men, which is, as it were, the internal sense of the Soul : and then when the reason reflects also upon this business, humane judgment prudentially weighing and estimating the reasons for it, and the Objections against it, together with the moment and importance of the thing, pronounces it upon due Consideration, to be the prime and most necessary concern of Mankind.

Bioph. But if you will make me your Disciple, I must intreat you to deal more expressly, and particularly with me, and to open to the very bottom, the Foundations of the thing in question. And let me beg your pardon, If I tell you that you are observed to be a Man of

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such

such Eloquence, that you are able to wheedle a Man into your Opinion, be it what it can. But I pray deal plainly, and rationally with me, seeing that otherwise if I should become your Convert, you will have but little credit by me, since, in that case, my zeal would be without knowledge, and my heat without light; and, besides (to wiser Men) you will but seem to beg the Question, and artificially to perswade to that which you cannot prove. Therefore (as I intimated before) pray make me to understand, that Religion is as reasonable in it self, and in its Principles, as you have represented it to be important in the consequences of it.

Sebast. I understand you, but I have gone more than half way in that already; for having shewed you the consequence of Religion to be such, as that a Man can neither live nor die comfortably without it, there is therefore all the reason in the World for it. For he that proves a thing to be necessary, does more than prove it to be real.

Bioph. That was a side blow, which I did not expect, I confess.

Sebast. But it is an home thrust to the business, it doth *jugulum petere* (as they say) for it

Prudence and self-love oblige a Man to be religious. obliges you as you are a Man, and pretend either to prudence, or self-love, to apply your self seriously to this affair;

nay, if there should be wanting such other proofs as you require, you cannot reasonably insist upon that, for you will acknowledge that self-preservation is the first and surest principle in Nature; and sure that is good proof, which
proves

proves that Man to be worse than a Fool who doth not follow it.

Bioph. That is home indeed: But let me tell you, it is one of my greatest prejudices against Religion, that the most zealous Defenders of it talk of probable Arguments, and prudential Considerations, &c. Now, for my part, I require natural and direct proofs, and nothing less will satisfy me.

Sebast. And, good *Biophilus*, had you not such given you in our last Conference, and that in the very point which you chose to join issue upon?

Bioph. I must confess, in that one point, of a judgment to come, you argued so shrewdly, that something of it sticks by me still, but it may be it was because I granted some things then for Civility sake, which I will not be held to now; besides, if you should make out some single point, and not the rest, I shall be never the nearer: for it will but make a Dispute and Confusion in my Mind, and will come to no Issue: forasmuch as if all those things that are necessary to the Being, and to the Obligation of Religion, be not resolved of, there can be no such thing as it. I desire therefore now to see your whole *Hypothesis* laid together, and all the grounds of it substantially made out.

Sebast. Why, that is done to my hand, and yours too, *Biophilus*, and you may save me the labour, if you please, by consulting the incomparable *Hugo Grotius*, Bishop *Wilkins*, or several other excellent Persons (whom I need not name) who have performed this with exquisite Learning and Judgment. And if you have not

the Books by you, I will furnish you with any of them.

Bioph. I thank you for the kind offer; but with your leave, I will stick to my first Request, that we may discuss this matter between our selves; both because in this way of Conference you can explain your self to me more fully, if I should not reach your meaning at first: and besides, I do not love that other Men should make my Answers or Objections for me, but had rather make them my self, (as best knowing where the Shooe pinches.)

*The advantage of
Conference above
reading of Books in
this debate of Re-
ligion.*

Sebast. If you will have it so, I am content to be at your service to the uttermost of my Power; but let me tell you by the way, that, tho' I take offence at nothing, yet I a little wonder'd at the caution you put in (even now) against Eloquence; what did you mean, *Biophilus*? What was you afraid of? For my part, I can pretend to no other Skill, than to render those things plain and easie, that were before true and reasonable, or at most to be able to deliver hard Arguments in soft words. Now, is an Argument ever the stronger for being crabbed and rough? Or the weaker, or less effectual, for being smooth and oily? Is it such a pleasure to be non-pluss'd in Mood and Figure, that you had rather be snap'd in the Mousetrap of a Syllogism, than treated Socratically and gently? I promise you, I will use no Legerdemain, no Slight of Hand with you; or if I should go about it, you are too sagacious to be imposed upon by me. If you have a phancy for scholastick
Gibberish,

Gibberish, and love to be cramp'd with an *Ergo*, I am not altogether to seek in that way neither : but, if you give me leave, I would rather chuse that way of discoursing which we have held hitherto, as that which is least apt to raise any heat or passion, and which will the most plainly and naturally represent the truth of things to you.

Bioph. Nay, marry, in such a case as this, I have as little phancy for chopping of Logick, as for the long wheedles of Rhetorick ; I require only (as I said) substantial proofs ; and so your Arguments be strong, I care not how soft and silken the lines be. Go on therefore in your own way, *in God's name*.

Sebast. I, that was well thought of indeed ; for without *God's Blessing* we shall lose all our labour : which that we may not do, let us both beg of him to guide our Minds in this affair, and let me also request of you, *Biophilus*, that you will grant me these two or three reasonable things, which are so very necessary to the success of our debate, that I shall be able to calculate the issue of it, from your ingenuity in the concession of them.

Bioph. Without more words, what are your demands ?

Sebast. In the first place, /I desire that you will wholly lay aside all Drollery, in the management of this cause, not only because the business we are upon (as I hope you shall acknowledge by and by) is too weighty and solemn to be lightly and triflingly dealt withall ; but especially, because this

*Preliminaries to
the dispute about
Religion.*

*Against wanton
Wit and Drollery in
religious matters.*

wanton trick of Drollery, is the onely engine in the World that can do mischief to Religion. Reason, with all its batteries, can never shake it; Expèience can never confute it; the greatest shrewdness and sagacity can never discover any flaws in it: but there is no fence against this flail of profane and scurrilous Drollery, that, with its apish tricks and Buffoonry, is able to render, not only the wisest Man in the World, but the most solid and substantial truth, ridiculous. And therefore I have observed that speculative Atheists are commonly well gifted this way; and the best of their Game is to put off that with a Jest, which they can never answer with all the Wit they have.

Bioph. 'Tis granted; I will be very serious: what would you more?

Sebast. My next demand is, That you will not doubt without cause, or some reason assignable of your doubting or denying any thing in Religion: for besides that otherwise the humour of doubting is endless and infinite, and a Man may at this rate doubt and deny the things that are most evident in nature, and even the principles of Discourse it self, as well as of Religion; besides this, I say, to doubt and deny thus groundlessly and licentiously or peevishly, is not so much properly to doubt, as plainly to shew an unwillingness we have that the thing we dispute about should be true; which is cowardly and disingenuous.

There is, certainly, a modesty, or a kind of gentle

gentile carriage due to all disputes, especially of this nature as we are upon ; and it is not allowable to be carping and captious, or to make use of little tricks and shifts to evade and put off an Argument instead of answering it : And let me tell you, this I have observed to be the usual method of the Adversaries of Religion. They will put a Man to prove every thing, even the most self evident Proposition : and one question shall beget another, and that other, only to perplex the cause, and to stave off the conclusion : or when a Man hath given very reasonable evidence of the point, they will yet put it off with, It may be otherwise ; as if nothing could be true, but what is impossible to be otherwise : which is as absurd, as if when a Man hath with the greatest care and choice of his Materials, and according to the best Rules of Architecture built an House, he should yet be afraid to dwell in it when all is done, merely because you cannot prove it to be impossible but that such an House may presently fall and oppress him in its Ruine.

Bioph. Be secure of me in that point also, I will discourse fairly and ingenuously, and weigh the force of your Arguments with the best judgment I have : is that all you would have ?

Sebast. There is but one thing more I would ask, and indeed that is implied in what you have yielded already ; but that we may not mistake one another, I will mention it, *viz* That you will be willing to believe Religion, if you see reason for it.

Bioph That is not an ingenuous demand, *Sebastian*, if I understand you : for whilst you seem

to ask my consent, you plainly beg your cause ; whereas you are to prove it with that evidence, as to make me believe it whether I will or no.

*Nothing can make
a man believe a-
gainst his will.*

Sebast. There it is now, that makes the necessity of my demand apparent : for it is a mighty mistake, *Biophilus*, to

think that any Arguments whatsoever can be sufficient to make a Man believe whether he will or no. It is a great question whether God Almighty can make any Man believe against his will : indeed it seems a Contradiction to suppose it. He hath given Men Freedom of Will, and *put them in the hand of their own counsel* ; bid them make their Election, chuse Life or Death : by which means as wise and good Men have the Glory and Comfort to co-operate towards their own happiness ; so perverse and obstinate Men have the shame and remorse of being guilty of their own Destruction. For when both Parties have light to guide them, and Motives and Arguments to perswade them, the one ingenuously complies, but the other wilfully refuses, and impleys the Prerogative of his nature, both against God, and his own Soul.

But in an humane way, it is plainly impossible : for if a Man have taken up his Post, which he resolves to maintain, it is not in the power of reason to remove him from it ; the Will is immoveable by any thing but it self, and Reason is no equal match for it. Now this is the case of a great part of the Adversaries to Religion, and this is the main disadvantage of its cause, that such Men have no mind it should be true ; and then, *non persuadebis etiamsi persuade-*
ris,

ris, they will hold the Conclusion in spight of the Premises: and this is the reason why I require of you to be willing to believe, before I begin my Argument; not that I require you should believe without proof, but that you should not oppose Prejudice to my Argument, but be true to your reason and to the evidence that shall be given.

Bioph. If that be all you mean, 'tis granted also; and now that you have done with your Cautions, before you enter upon the business, I must ask one thing of you, namely, That in this Socratical way of discoursing (as you call it) you will not be too prolix in your Arguments, heaping one consequence upon the neck of another, till they make so long a train, that a Man cannot seem from end to end, but deal concisely and decretorily, that I may be brought as compendiously as may be to the point you drive at.

Sebast. Indeed, *Biophilus*, if I had thought of it, I ought to have cautioned against that very thing which you now demand: for this is another capital mistake in those Men that are Strangers to these matters, and which hath the fatal mischief to confirm a great many in Atheism, they expect to jump into the full understanding of Religion presently, whensoever they make it the subject of their Discourse; and if it be not decided in one Syllogisin or two, they immediately begin a triumph, and conclude it is a thing cannot be proved at all by reason. I confess to you that God, in compassion to Mankind, hath discovered a short cut over to the other World; I mean

*Shortness of reason
and impatience of
the whole process of
an Argument is the
fatal miscarriage
of Atheists.*

66 *A Winter-Evening* Part III.

mean a very compendious way to a full knowledge of, and satisfaction in all the Mysteries of Religion, and that is by the *Holy Scripture*, which he devised on purpose, because some Mens Capacities will not reach to a long Argument and the occasions and busie life of others will not give them leisure to attend the difficult and laborious process of reason. But because you reject that, and will not permit God Almighty to judge for you, but will be your own judge in the case; therefore you must have patience in this way of Probation you put me upon. For if a Man will take nothing for current Coin, but what he hath wrought out of the Ore himself, nor believe any thing to be truth but what he hath drawn out of the depth by his own skill and strength, he must be content to take a great deal of pains, and be at the expence of a great deal of time, before he can arrive at Satisfaction; however, I hope, you shall have no occasion to accuse me of tediousness in this Argument.

Bioph. You speak reason, I confess, and I yield you this together with all your other Preliminaries: Now therefore to the business.

Sebast. Know then, *Biophilus*, (without any farther Preface) that all this great Fabrick of Religion stands upon these three Pillars, *viz.*

The three Pillars of Religion, and the stress that lies on each of them.

First, That there is a God, as the Object of Devotion and Religious Observance.

Secondly, That this God, exercises a Providence over his Creatures, and Mankind especially; and so by observing how they carry themselves towards him,

him, and consequently being able to reward or punish them accordingly, lays an Obligation upon them to observe and worship him.

Thirdly, That Mankind is a subject capable of such an Obligation, and of paying such Devotion and Observance to the Deity.

Mistake me not : I say, upon all these three together in Conjunction doth the truth and reality of Religion depend, but if any one of them was wanting, it will be manifest that Religion would vanish into a Romance, and come to nothing.

For in the first place, If there were no God, it would not only be certain that there is nothing to whom Religion could be due, but it would be as certain that there could be no Providence nor other Consideration to enforce the care of it ; and then consequently let the Constitution of Mankind be as capable of noble performance as can be imagined, yet there could be no ground nor foundation of Religion.

Again, If we should acknowledge the Being of a God, and him also fit to be worshipped ; yet if there be no Providence, so that this God doth not mind whether Men serve or disserve him, and consequently could not reward or punish accordingly, though it might in this case be satisfied to be a decent thing for all Creatures to pay some kind of homage to so excellent a Being ; yet there can be no danger to them if they do not so, consequently no sufficient obligation upon them to perform it.

And lastly, If there be both a God and a Providence acknowledged, and consequently an Obligation to Religion : yet if Mankind be not
a sub-

a subject capable of it ; that is, if either he hath it not in his power to know God's Will, or it is not in his choice to serve or disserve him, the business of Religion cannot concern him, nor can it be expected from him.

But if all these three things meet, and prove certainly true, then is this business of Religion fully founded, and as immoveable as the Foundations of Heaven and Earth. For as I said, the first Proposition describes the Object, the third qualifies the Subject, and the second lays the Obligation of Religion, which is all that can be required in the case.

Bioph. You begin very shrewdly, I protest, and like a Man that would do the business at last. Your Argument is close and substantial, your Enumeration of particulars exact, and your Consequence undeniable : I say, if those three things be proved, which yet you only suppose ; the pinch of the business therefore lies in the proof of those three Assertions ; and if you are able to make out the truth of them severally, as you have done the consequence of Religion from the acknowledgment of them jointly, I must turn over a new leaf, and be a Profelyte, there is no help for it. First therefore, how do you prove there is a God ?

Sebast. Ah, *Biophilus*, hath not God given sufficient proof of himself to your own Heart and Conscience, by the lively impresses he hath made of himself there ; and hath he not made Demonstration of his Divinity to all the World by all his Operations, especially by the Creation of this mighty Fabrick of Heaven and Earth, and all that admirable Power, Wisdom and Goodness,

ness, which shines through the whole frame of Nature? This (let me tell you) is the proof of himself, which he himself appeals to, *Psal. 19. 1. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament setteth forth his handy work.* And again, *Rom. 1. 22. The invisible things of him are seen by the creation of the World, &c.*

Bioph. What pity it is that so brave a beginning should come off thus poorly! I did suspect it would come to this; but could you think, *Sebastian*, that I would be born down with the Authority of an old Book in such a case as this is? no, no, I must have my reason satisfied: I say again *The proof of the Being of God.* therefore, how do you prove there is a God?

Sebast. You are, I perceive, as quick in replying as you are slow in believing: however I am glad, that though you are incredulous, you are not humorsome too. Some Man perhaps in your place would have said let me see a God; but it seems you are content to have your reason satisfied. Now do not mistake me, *Biophilus*, I did not intend to urge you with the Authority of these Sacred Writers, but with the force of the Argument they make use of. Tell me then in earnest, how do you satisfy your reason concerning the existence of any thing which you do not see? or, in brief; Do you not think that to be sufficient proof of the Being of a Cause, when it is made out by its Effects?

Bioph. Yes, I do; for if I see (*Phænomena*, or) appearances of things, which I can give no account of without resolving them into such a cause, then I conclude such a cause must be as real

real as those appearances or effects are.

Sebast. Very good, then I tell you, after the same manner I prove there is a God, namely, because there are such effects as speak and necessarily require such a Cause.

Bioph. Now you are right again, make that out and you do your work.

Sebast. That there is such a thing as that which we call the World, or this great building of Heaven and Earth, with all the Furniture and Inhabitants of it, this I am sure you will grant; but how this World came to be what it is, is to be considered of: Now, say I, as Art betrays an Artist, and the Effect the Cause; so doth the Being of a World speak a God that made it. The mere existence of such a thing as a World, requires that there be a Cause of that existence, and that is it which we mean by a *first Cause*; and then the admirable art and plain footsteps of skill and contrivance, which are visible in the frame of this World, require that this first Cause be wise and powerfull, which is the more *compleat Notion of a God*. So that, (as I said) so surely as there is a World, so surely there must be a God; forasmuch as if there had not been a God to make it, there could have been nothing at all: is not this plain proof, *Biophilus*, and such as you required?

Bioph. Very far from it I assure you (if my understanding fail me not) for, in the first place, why might not the World make it self? Or, secondly, why might it not be from Eternity, without beginning? Or, lastly, why might it not be made by chance? All which Opinions, you know, have had their respective Patrons.

Now

Now any of these ways (it is evident, that) your Argument for a God comes to nothing.

Sebast. God help you, *Biophilus*; Did not you promise that you would not seek to shift off the Arguments I should

*That the World
could not make it
self.*

bring for this cause, by little querks and evasions? And can you so soon find in your heart to give countenance to the most exploded absurdities? Nay, to swallow the most palpable contradictions, rather than yield to reason for the belief of a God. And that this is your case, is evident enough, by the multitude of shifts you muster together at this present: For I assure my self, if you durst have trusted to any one of these singly, you would have insisted on that, and not mentioned the other; and you know, if each of them single are absurd, the combination of them all together, cannot mend the matter, nor make a reasonable Objection against the Argument I have brought.

Bioph. You say well, but then you must make it appear that all these are mere subterfuges, otherwise they must stand for a sufficient answer: and, I pray you, in the first place, why might not the World make it self? and then there is no need of a God.

Sebast. Even for this small reason this World could not make it self, because it implies a flat Contradiction: for then it must be cause and Effect, in the same respect, and at the same time; *i. e.* it must act before it was, and be before it self: in a word, it must be and not be together, and if that be not absurd enough, I know not what is so.

Bioph.

Bioph. I confess, you seem to have loaded that conceit with *odium* enough; but then, how comes it to pass that the Men of your Perswasion digest all this impossibility well enough in another way, when they say, God had his Being from himself, or gave Being to himself? if this can be true, I see not but the other may.

Sebast. Very right, Sir, for either of them is impossible: but you mistake (the Men of my Perswasion, as you call them) for there is no Man of sense will say or mean, that positively God gave Beginning or Being to himself; but only negatively, that he had not his Being from any other Cause; that is, he is properly an Eternal necessary Being, without any Causes, or Beginning at all: and if you go about to apply this to the World, you forsake your first hold, and fly to your second refuge.

Bioph. I am sensible of what you say. I confess my first Objection is not tenable; but what say you then to the second? Why may not the World be Eternal? And then you seem to grant there can be no necessity of a God.

Sebast. To your second Evasion I oppose these three things, which when you have considered of, I doubt not but you will see it to be no better than the former.

*That the World
could not be from E-
ternity.*

Namely, first, I will shew you that you can gain nothing by it, if it should be true. Secondly, that the supposition of it is more difficult and incredible, than that which you seek to avoid by it: and, Thirdly, That it is impossible it should be true.

First,

First, You can gain nothing towards the Satisfaction of your Mind, or for the easing you of any Difficulty, by asserting the Eternity of the World. For the greatest difficulty in the whole business of Religion, and indeed in all Philosophy too, is, to acknowledge such a thing as an Eternal Being, or any thing that hath neither cause nor beginning, which here you swallow without chewing, in supposing the World to be Eternal.

It is true indeed, if a Man look to the very bottom of things, it is not to be avoided, but that some Eternal, and self-existent Being must be granted. For seeing nothing can give Being to it self (as I shewed you but now) it is plain that either something must have been without beginning, or nothing could have been at all; *i. e.* there must be either an Eternal God, or some eternal Cause or other, or nothing could ever have been in time. For whatever first begins to be, must take its rise from something that had no beginning.

This, I say, must necessarily be yielded by every considering Man, and you confess as much, when, to avoid the acknowledgment of a God, you suppose the World to be eternal. Now in so doing you bring in as great a difficulty (at least) as that which you would seem to avoid; for the belief of an Eternal Being is manifestly the hardest thing to conceive in the whole Notion of a God: so that (as I said) you expedite no difficulty thereby, but only plainly betray an unwillingness to believe there is a God, and that is all that comes of it.

Nay, secondly, This Supposition of yours is far more difficult than that which it is designed to avoid. For it is apparently more unreasonable to allow Eternity to the World than to God ; because to be eternal, or to be without cause and beginning, implies a necessity of existence, or that such a thing could not but be: for nothing can be conceived to be without Efficient or Cause of its Being, but that which could not but be, or which was impossible not to be. Now I dare appeal to you whether it be not more reasonable to suppose such a superlatively excellent kind of Being, to be the privilege of a wise, powerful and free Agent (by which we mean a God) than to apply it to that Lump of Matter (which we call the World;) or (which amounts to the same thing) whether it be not more likely that this wonderful Prerogative of first being, or necessity of existence (which you acknowledge must be seated somewhere) should be accompanied with Life, Understanding, Freedom of Will, &c. all which are in the Notion of a God, than that such a Prerogative should go alone, and so the first and principal Being, be in effect one of the meanest, as being destitute of all those other Perfections, as must needs be, if the World be that first and Eternal Being.

Especially if you cast in this also, that neither you nor any rational Man would ever have gone about to fantasie the World's being necessarily existent or without beginning, but only for want of a God to make it (I mean upon account of the difficulty of understanding such a Being as is required in the case;) now forasmuch as that includes no greater difficulty, than what
you

you are constrained to acknowledge without a God, it is extremely unjust to rely upon it as a sufficient Objection against him.

But, thirdly and lastly, This Suggestion of yours concerning the Eternity of the World is plainly impossible to be true: as it were easie to make out in any of the several parts or parcels, of which it consists. But I will content my self to shew it you in the instance of Mankind only, and that after this manner.

If Mankind was from Eternity or without Beginning, then it must consequently be acknowledged that there have been infinite Successions of Men, one after another, and that some of those Generations have been infinitely distant from others. For all this is implied in infinite Succession, or the Eternity of successive Beings. But now let us take what link we will of this Chain, I mean, let us take what Man soever in this infinite line, it is certain he will be but Thirty, or Forty, or an Hundred Years (more or less) elder than some Son of his, which proceeded from him by lineal Descent. And then it is as plain that in this case, that Son of his (whoever he was) is not eternal or of infinite Duration, because he is of less Duration than his Father, by the said Thirty or Forty Years, (or more or less;) and on the other side, it is plain also, that the Father cannot be eternal, or of infinite Duration neither, because he is but Thirty or Forty Years (as aforesaid) elder than the said Son who was finite. For a finite number added to a finite can never make an infinite. Therefore (upon the whole) this race of Mankind cannot be infinite, but must have

had a beginning, and consequently there must be a God who gave beginning to him, and to all things else. What think you now, *Biophilus*? what is become of your second Evasion of a God, by supposing the World to be Eternal?

Bioph. Truly I cannot well tell what to say, but that I am deceived in you; I suspected you would have entertained me with long Harangues, and have wheedled me with Oratory; but I fear now you will run me down by main force, unless there be some trick of Sophistry in it.

Sebast. God forbid that I should tell a lye for him, whose Cause needs not to be defended by a Cheat; no, assure your self the Argument is sound and substantial; if I had known the least flaw in it, I would never have made use of it; and I am confident the more you consider it, the more solid and unanswerable you will find it.

Biaph. Then I perceive, I am reduced to my last refuge, That the World was made by Chance, or else I must yield you there is a God; and why may not that be true, which a great Sect of Philosophers, I mean the Epicureans, held, viz. That some lucky hit of Matter at last produced the World without a God? and if once things were gotten into Being without him, there could be no necessity afterwards to introduce him, and consequently no obligation of Religious Observance towards him.

Sebast. In those last words you reason very well, *Biophilus*, and it's pity you had not a better Hypothesis to exercise it upon. For it is very true, that if it was possible to imagine a
World

World to be made any other way, or without a God, there could be no sufficient reason to bring him upon the Stage, or much less any Religious Obligation towards him; and therefore doubtless it was only Hypocrisie and a piece of Cunning in your Epicurean Friends, to bring in a God when they had sanfied the making of the World without him: the former they did to decline the *odium* of flat Atheism, and to secure themselves from the danger of Humane Laws; but by the latter they undermined the reasons of Religion, which was the thing they aimed at. But as to that Hypothesis of theirs, which you now espouse, it is the most miserable shift of all you have made. For,

1. This takes for granted, That the matter of the World existed of it self and was Eternal, which I doubt not but hath appeared absurd enough by what hath been said already upon the former Head.

2. It supposes also matter to be in motion, without any cause of that motion; which is worse than the former, since we can never satisfie our selves that motion naturally belongs to matter, but contrariwise, that it is only passive, and capable of receiving it from something else. Now till these two things be proved, it is in vain to dream what lucky hits might happen in order to the Production of a World.

3. It supposes mere Chance and blind Contingency to be the sole cause of the most Wise, Regular and Artificial Effects that can be imagined. Now it seems beyond measure ridiculous to think that such a World as this plainly is, wherein there are undeniably all the foot-

steps of the most exquisite skill and contrivance; wherein (I say) there is both such admirable variety of things, and yet such exact order and correspondence of one thing with another, and withal such constancy in the Laws of the whole, that this should be effected notwithstanding, without any reason or wisdom, and be the product of blind Chance. It were certainly a thousand times more manly to imagine that Books were written by the casual co-incidence of Letters, or Houses and Ships were built by a fortuitous jumble of Stones, Iron and Timber, than that Chance should make such a World as this, which for Greatness, Order, Symmetry and Beauty, and all other instances of Art and Wisdom, infinitely surpasses all humane performances whatsoever: and now, what is become of your three formidable Objections?

Bioph. Nay, do not triumph too soon, *Sebastian*, the Field is not yet won; For I have a reserve that may chance put you to it still, and it is this; You have, I confess, argued smartly to prove the World could not be made without an Efficient, but you forget that this will recoil upon your self, who have taken no care for matter out of which God should make a World; and sure it is as difficult to want Matter as to want an Architect.

*God needed not
Matter out of which
to make a World.*

Sebast. It is very true, I have not, in my Hypothesis provided matter for the making of the World, but yet I have proved an eternal, perfect and unlimited Being for the Efficient, who may very well be supposed to be able to supply the want of that

our

out of his own eminent Perfection : for it is certain that the first and supreme Cause must needs have the Root and Seeds of all things in himself, and eminently contain all the powers of inferior causes, and consequently may well be supposed able to supply a material Cause, at least here is no contradiction in all this, and therefore it cannot be said to be impossible, (for nothing can be justly pronounced to be the latter, but what falls under the former) but now for motion to begin without a mover, and any thing to be effected without an active cause, is plainly contradictory to our Reason, and therefore to be pronounced impossible.

You see an instance, or at least some kind of resemblance of the former in our selves ; we frame thoughts out of the pregnancy of our own minds without any matter to make them of, and therefore we may much rather allow God to be able to do so.

Besides, if I should grant you that God had matter at hand out of which to make a World, you would be at the same loss still to know how he was able to make Souls out of it ; and such things there are in the World, which it is every whit as difficult to shew how they can be extracted out of matter, as to suppose matter it self to be supplied by the unconfined power of the Supreme Agent ; and therefore you had as good rest satisfied in the answer above, *viz.* That for any thing to begin to be without an Efficient is contradictory, but to begin to be without a material Cause can never be proved to be so. And now, I hope, your Reserve is vanquished as well as your Main Body, and you will now acknow-

ledge that notwithstanding all your Objections to the contrary, the mere Fabrick of the World is a sufficient evidence of a God.

Phil. I have with great Satisfaction heard all this long Dispute between you my two Friends; I could not in Conscience take your part, *Biophilus*, and I know *Sebastian*, you need not my assistance, and I am glad to see Victory begin to incline to the right side: but all this while I could not chuse but stand and admire the Divine Patience, who suffers the curious and ingratel wit of Man to impeach his very Being. Lord! that those who were brought into the World by him, should so strenuously endeavour to exclude him out of it; and that those should muster up all their wits against him, that made them to differ from the Beasts.

It is matter of just wonder that Men should be so unwilling to believe a God, and take so much pains to dispute him out of Being.

But what should be the occasion of this I cannot imagine, nor what should tempt Men to be so unwilling to believe a God. If like (what the Poets say of) *Saturn*, he eat up his own Children; or like *Moloch*, the Idol of the *Ammonites*,

he could be pretended to take delight in the sad cries and dying groans of his Worshippers, they could not well do more against him than they do.

Or if he was a severe Tyrant, that lay at catch for his Subjects, and like *Busyris* or *Phalaris*, imploy'd himself wholly in devising Tortures for them; or if he was a God of mere Power and Will, and so always to be horribly dreaded, because

because Men know not what use he would make of his unlimited Power, no wonder then if they were willing to be rid of him.

Or if he was only (*ὅτις ἀπὸ μηχανῆς*) a mere necessary Agent, that only served a certain turn in the world, namely, to give beginning to Motion, then when that work was done, Men might perhaps be content to spare him.

But since he is perfect Wisdom, and perfect Goodness, and in one word, Perfection it self, containing in his own Nature all that is desirable, the first of Beings, and therefore can want nothing, because there was nothing before him to restrain or limit him, and because all things were in him as in their Fountain, infinitely full and self-sufficient, that he can need nothing from his Creatures, nor can grudge them any thing that is fit for them.

A God that made us merely out of the overflowings of his own Goodness, and that he might have those whom he might delight and make happy in the Communications of himself to them.

A God that is always present to us, tender of us, and daily doth us good in this World, and hath provided an Heaven of unspeakable felicity to receive us into, and treat us in, when he takes us hence.

That God is a desirable Being, &c.

What can tempt us, I say, to wish he were not, to dispute his Being, or so much as to entertain a doubt concerning him, who is the most desirable thing in the whole World?

Come, *Biophilus*, lay down your Arms and submit to this great and good God, and he will pardon you ; you dispute all this while against
your

your self and your own Comfort more than against him. There is no contending with the Almighty, he can confute you with Thunder, and Fire, and Brimstone, and so he might right himself, but then you will perish; but he is pitifull and gracious, and had rather you should be sensible of his Goodness, than feel the effects of his Power. You said, reason would satisfy you, and I think you have had it from *Sebastian*; deal ingenuously therefore; Do you not see sufficient ground to believe there is a God? It is no dishonour to yield to truth.

Bioph. I perceive I am assaulted on both sides, like the Traveller in the Fable, by the Sun and the Wind; *Sebastian* hath press'd hard upon me by Arguments, and you, *Philander*, have charm'd me with your Eloquence, and the lovely Picture you have drawn of God. I can no longer withstand you, I yield, I yield there is a God.

Sebast. God be thanked we are gotten one step onwards of our way towards Religion, we have a God to worship; but I must ingenuously confess to you (as I have intimated already) that this will not do the business if we go no farther. For though in consideration that there is a God, and he a great and excellent Being, it may be fit and decent to worship him; yet this hath not the effect of a Law, nor sufficiently obliges any Creature to the doing of it, unless it ap-

That there is a Providence in and over the World, is the second Principle of Religion.

pear also that this God exercise a Providence over the World, that is, unless he observe the Carriage, remark the Actions, whether good or evil, of those he expects Religious

gious Observance from, and will some way or other call them to account, and reward or punish them respectively. But if this second point be made out too, this will bring the business home, and make it the great concern of all those that love themselves, to be devout and Religious.

Bioph. I am very sensible of it, *Sebastian*, and that not only because my old Master *Epicurus* granted a God, but denying a Providence, thought himself secure enough from that God, and under no Obligations to Religion; but also because your own Method, which you have laid down, requires it: let that therefore be your next undertaking.

Sebast. It shall be so, *Biophilus*, and that not only for the Reasons you give me for so doing, but also because I am aware, that although the Argument I made use of for the proof of the Being of God, be strong and unanswerable, yet I confess it was something obscure and metaphysical (which there was no help for) but now if I make out that there is a Providence, this will add both light and strength to what I have hitherto discoursed? For though it may be imagined that there is a God, and yet no Providence, yet it is indubitable, that if there be a Providence, there must be a God.

Now that there is such a Providence as we speak of, I doubt not to convince any considerate Man of, these two ways, *viz.*

1. From the Causes and Reasons of it.
2. From the visible Instances and Effects of it.

Proofs of a Providence.

In the first place, There is very great reason to assure ones self that God exercises a Providence over the World, from the Consideration of those Perfections, which (by what hath been said already) appear to be in the Divine Nature, namely, Infinite Wisdom and Power, both which we must necessarily ascribe to him, whom we allow to be Creator of the World. Now there can be no reason to doubt whether it be in his power to look over and mind all the passages of the World, when we have acknowledged his power to have been sufficient to give beginning to that which was not, and to make a World out of nothing, which is incomparably the more difficult Province.

And then if we are satisfied that such a Providence is not impossible, the same Wisdom which joined with his Power in making the World, will oblige him to exert and put forth himself in the management of it when he hath made it. For it is not conceivable that a wise Being should wholly abandon and be unconcerned for that piece of Workmanship of his wherein he hath made the greatest demonstration of Art and Skill in the contrivance of. Such a supine negligence as this is not easily to be suspected in the meanest of intelligent Beings; and therefore there can be no colour of reason that the first and most perfect of Beings should be thought guilty of it.

This I take to be a sufficient Argument of a Providence between you and me, now that you are come to the acknowledgment of a God and Creator of the World; but I will not insist upon

upon it, because I promised to give such evidence of this Point, as should at the same time (and *à majori*, as they say) conclude the former Principle also, I mean, That there is a God.

And therefore I should now come to the second way of probation, *viz.* from the visible instances and effects of a Providence, but (you remember) I have already prevented my self herein, by what passed between us in a former Conference, where

*V. Conf. 2. pag.
183. to p. 201.*

I shew'd, at large, the evident Footsteps of Providence in his managing or over-ruling the ordinary course of nature in two remarkable instances, *viz.* 1. In the Prophecies and Predictions of things to come, which have been so admirably verified in the Event, as must argue an All-seeing Eye over all the Motions of second Causes. And, 2. In the Miracles that have been wrought in the several Ages of the World, wherein the Divine Majesty hath apparently interposed, and either suspended or over-ruled, hightned or accelerated the Motion and force of Natural causes, and by both together, given proof of his Being, and of his minding the affairs of the World.

I assure my self I shall not need to repeat that Argument at large, but may trust your Memory for it; only, if now upon so long time of Consideration, you have any thing material to object on that account, I am ready to make good what I have asserted.

Bioph. I must needs say you deal fairly and ingenuously thus far; and now that I recollect the sum and drift of that discourse of yours, I have,

The great Objection against Providence is, that there are no Miracles to be seen now.

have, as I think, this very material thing to say against it, namely, That we cannot observe any such Interpositions of Divine Providence as you speak of now-a-days, but the World is left wholly to the course of Natural Causes. If you could have appealed either to Miracles or Prophecy in the present Age, so that a Man might have made his own Eyes witnesses of Matter of fact, then the Argument would have been irrefragable; but foras much as we see no such things in the present times, why should we be so credulous as to believe there ever were? Afoffail me this difficulty clearly and substantially, and it will go a great way with me; for I acknowledge (as you observe) that if this Argument be found, the influence of it extends farther than the present Question, and to be sure will leave no doubt that there is a God.

Sebast. I am very sensible of the importance of your Objection, and of the necessity that a sufficient answer be made to it; but I do not, in the least, doubt but you will find it in the following Particulars, by that time you have laid them together.

A full Answer to the aforesaid Objection.

First, I suppose you will grant me that there can be no need of, or reason for God's displaying himself by Miracles or a Spirit of Prophecy in the present Age, for the assurance of a Providence, if so be we may be sufficiently secured that he hath indubitably given those evidences already in former Ages. For he that hath once sufficient grounds given him to believe such a Point, hath

hath always an Obligation upon him to believe that thing, without repeated Proofs of it. And it is unreasonable to expect that God Almighty should be bound to exert his Omnipotency, or any way put out of course the order of Natural Causes, merely for the Gratification of Mens Curiosity or Phancy, but only for the satisfaction of their Reason in so important a Point.

Then, Secondly, In the next place I will shew you that (bating merely the gratifying of Curiosity and Phancy, as aforesaid) we may have as credible and sufficient assurance of a Miracle or other extraordinary passage of Providence, which was done many Ages ago, as we could have, if such a thing was to be done in the present Age. This will perhaps seem a little strange to you at first, but your wonder will abate when you consider these two things:

1. That it cannot be expected that God should so far comply with the humour of Men, as to work Miracles every day, and in the sight of every Man. Miracles are a kind of Parenthesis in the ordinary course of Nature, or, as it were, a short Digression from the usual method of things. Now if such Digressions should be daily made, it would be, in a manner, a total superseding of the ordinary course of Nature; and so instead of serving the particular turn or humour of some Men, the whole Race of Mankind would be deprived of a greater and more remarkable Miracle than all the other put together, namely, that of the stable and constant course of Nature. And such frequent irregularities as must follow upon

*The demand of
daily and frequent
Miracles is very ab-
surd.*

that

that Concession, would put a very great Temptation upon Men to suspect that there was no constant Law and Rule in the Creation, but that Chance carried all before it; which would make an Objection indeed against Providence. And yet it is certain that notwithstanding this horrible mischief, so it must be done, if every particular Man must have his Eyes witnesses of Miracles before he believes them. For it is plain that if God should vouchsafe one or more Miracles to the present Age, it could not be done before every Man: and therefore some of them, if they will believe a Providence upon that account, must trust to other Mens Eyes for the grounds of their belief.

And thus we see it was in those times and places where Miracles were most frequent, as suppose in the time of our Saviour, those mighty Works which he wrought whilst he was upon Earth, and even his Resurrection it self, were not obvious to the Eyes of all Men, but only to so many as might render them sufficiently credible by their Testimony; and as for the generality, they must content themselves to *believe without seeing*, St. John 20, 29. as he himself told them.

Ancient Miracles are as credible as those that are present, and in some respects more certain.

2. If God should so far condescend to the incredulity of Men, as to permit generally their Eyes and Senses to be witnesses of such extraordinary Passages of providence as we speak of, it would not have such success as you imagine, for there would not want Objections against this also: some would

would then suspect their very Senses, or say that either their Imaginations were deluded, or else it may be all was done by Natural Causes, though perhaps they did not well understand them, or at least would conclude that which appears to be a Miracle was merely an Accident, and so there is no account to be sought or given of it. Thus we know the greatest Miracles that ever were wrought have been shifted of, and eluded even in the times wherein they were done, and by those Men that saw them. But now when those things that I make the instances of a Providence, (the ancient Miracles I mean) have undergone the Test of Time, and been canvassed and discussed in several Ages, and yet no flaw is found in them: in this case, I say, we have more full ground for our belief, than if the things had been fresh before our Eyes: for that same incredulous humour which now objects against the credit of things, because they were done long ago, would find out as good a trick to put upon a present Miracle (if it was to be had) namely, such a Man would say (and with more colour of reason) that though I cannot detect the Cheat of this for the present, yet time may discover it, which cannot be said in the other case.

But, Thirdly and lastly, I add to all aforesaid, That tho' it is true, that all Ages are not alike illustrated with such prodigious Acts of Providence as are properly and strictly called Miracles, yet there is no time of the World wherein there are not very plainly the Prints of Divinity, and

*The present times
not destitute of
marks of Provi-
dence.*

evidences of a Providence continually presiding over the World, if Man do not humourfomly despise them (for want of the pompous Circumstances of Miracles) or stupidly over-look them, because of their commonness and frequency; such as (for example) the preserving the several species of things in the World, that amongst that vast multitude of the kinds of Birds, or Insects, &c. and their several enmities to one another, and the many accidents all of them are exposed to, there should notwithstanding in so long a tract of time, not be any one kind of them lost or extinguished. •

That the Holy Scriptures and Christian Religion should be upheld in spite of the Combination of Wit and Ignorance, Power and Malice against them.

That Civil Government should be preserved against all the Interests of resolutely wicked Men, and against all the brutish violence of the enraged *Mobile*.

Besides the remarkable Infatuation of the Counsels, discovering the Plots, and defeating the Designs of Crafty and Atheistical Politicians: The frequent terrours upon the Consciences, and damps upon the Spirits of the most desperate and flagitious Men, and the assisting, animating and comforting the Hearts of good Men in their greatest Agonies and most difficult undertakings. Some of these things I mentioned before in our former Conference, and all of them are such as happen in every Age, and are never the less evidences of Providence for being ordinary.

Indeed

Indeed it may and doth fall out that now and then things happen quite otherwise, as that Conspiracies of wicked Men are successfull, &c. and God Almighty seems to order it so on purpose, because he will not be traced in his Methods, and because he will leave some trials of Mens willingness to believe in him and depend upon him: but the other course is so usual, and things often fall out so patly that way, that it must be extreme humourousness to deny a Providence in them.

But, besides all these, there is one thing more comes now to my mind, which is indeed beyond all the forementioned, and seems to be set up on purpose by Divine Providence as a standing Monument of it self to all Ages, and that is the present Condition of the *Jews*.

They were once a great and flourishing Kingdom, and fortunate beyond all example; but now from the time that they grew incurably wicked and rebellious against the God that had so signally bless'd them, and had to all their other impieties crucified the Saviour of the World; They have now (I say) for the space of sixteen or seventeen hundred of Years, been *like the Field which God hath cursed*, and been the most prodigious instance of unhappiness that ever was in the World. Forasmuch as though they are still vastly numerous, a cunning, crafty and projecting sort of People, yet they are every where scattered through all Nations, but every where under marks of Infamy, and no where able to become a People so as to live under Laws and a Government of their own: notwithstanding all which, and which is the wonder of all, they keep up

their Stock and Pedigree with the greatest exactness imaginable, as if God intended (as certainly he did) by all this to set them forth as a lively instance both of his just Providence, and of the truth of the Spirit of Prophecy in the Holy Scriptures. And now this, together with the foregoing instances, I think, affords sufficient evidence that God doth not now neglect the World, and leave all to run in the Road of Natural Causes, but even in these latter Ages as well as formerly gives some signal strokes of an over-ruling hand: which was the thing to be proved. And thus the two first Principles of Religion are secured. What think you, *Biophilus*? deal plainly, and if you have any thing further to say to the contrary, propound it.

Bioph. Truly I have nothing very material to say farther.

Sebast. Then God be thanked we have now gained two feet for Religion to stand upon; namely, we have a God to whom it is due, and we have an Obligation from the Consideration of his Providence, to make all the World careful and observant of him, at least so far as any part of the Creation is capable of such a duty.

Bioph. Very right, but I remember you said, That to lay the Foundation of Religion effectually, there must be consideration also of the subjects of it: and it must appear in particular, that Mankind is under a capacity of the aforesaid Obligation, and of paying and performing this duty towards the Divine Majesty accordingly. Now

The third Principle of Religion, that Man is a Subject capable of it.

as for this, though I foresee no difficulty in the case, yet however, I pray, express your self a little more fully about it, lest I should be under any mistake.

Sebast. The bottom of this third Point is no more but this: To make Mankind a Subject capable of the Obligations of Religion, these three things are requisite :

1. That he be able in some measure to judge what carriage from himself is fit and decent towards God.

2. That he be a free Agent, and have it in his choice and power to determine himself towards the performance of what he understands to be fit and decent, or towards the contrary if he will.

3. That he be able to reflect upon what he hath done, so as to accuse and condemn, or to acquit and justify himself accordingly as his Actions and Carriage towards the Deity have been agreeable or disagreeable to the judgment aforesaid.

The first of these Powers and Capacities is commonly called *Understanding* ; the second, *Will* or *Freedom of choice* ; and the third is known by the name of *Conscience*.

Without the first of these, namely, if Mankind had not *Understanding* to discern the difference of things, and some rule within him whereby to judge of moral Good and Evil, he would be lawless and brutish, having no other measures to go by than his Passions and Senses.

Without the second, namely, If he had not *Freedom of Will* to determine himself towards Good and Evil, as he pleased, he must then be

under a fatal necessity of doing whatsoever he should happen to doe: and then as he could give no proof of his Temper and Inclination, so there could be no such thing as acceptableness to God when he did well, nor blameableness when he did otherwise; because there could be no such things as Vertue or Vice in his case: and consequently no more room for either rewards or punishments, than there is in the motion of Plants or Stones, or any other the most insensible things

Without the third and last, *viz.* If Mankind had not such a faculty in him as we call *Conscience*, so as to reflect upon his own Actions and Carriage, and by vertue of which he either applauds and justifies himself when he hath obeyed the best reason of his mind, or upbraids and scourges himself whensoever he hath done otherwise, he could neither have any spur to Vertue, nor check upon Vice, and consequently would have no regard what use he made of his liberty.

But by all these together (if they appear to be inherent in Humane Nature) Mankind is fully qualified for the Obligations of Religion.

Now looking over the World as far as we can, we find no Creature that we converse with, to be indowed with these faculties but our selves, and then looking into our selves we find by undeniable experience that we have every one of the aforesaid capacities in our Nature: and hence I conclude that Man, and Man only of all Creatures (in the visible World) is the Subject of Religion. And this I called the third Fundamental Principle of Religion; not that I take it to be properly and strictly so, but in regard

gard it is manifest by what hath been said, that there can be no sure ground for Religion without it.

And thus, I think, I have fully answered your demand concerning the ground-work of Religion, and laid out a Foundation both large enough and strong enough to bear the whole Structure. And now I hope you will see no cause to suspect it to be a mere melancholy Fancy, or politick Stratagem, the result of Education, or effect of Weakness and Fear, but the most manly and rational thing that any Man can concern himself about.

Bioph. I confess, you have done as you say, *Sebastian*, and I thank you heartily for it; it is true, I could still have found out something or other to have replied, but I promised you I would not use mere subterfuges and disingenuous shifts, and I find without them there is nothing to be said farther in the case; so that in plain *English* I must profess I cannot tell whether more to admire, you or my self, pardon the Expression; I mean, whether more to be ashamed of my own stupidity, that have thus laugh'd in my sleeve at Religion, or your Prudence that first hedg'd me in with your Preliminary Demands, that my Mind could not rove from the Point, and then pursued me with close Arguments, that I have no way to escape. In short, I am convinced so far, that Religion is a thing diligently to be heeded, and carefully inquired into; I pray therefore, leave me not in the Briars you have brought me into, but as you have discovered to me the Foundations, so tell me what Superstructures must be made upon them. In

the first place, what do you mean by Religion ?

A general Description of Religion. *Sebast. By Religion in general I understand nothing else but a serious Study to know God, together with a carefull endeavour*

to please him, and procure his favour. This is that which not only the several Sects of Christians mean by Religion, but is that which all Men of Sense, and even the better sort of Pagans themselves agree in.

Bioph. By the easiness of your Expression, and the few words you have made use of in this Description, one would think the business it self was more easie than I doubt I shall find it to be: but, I pray, however consider me as an Idiot and a Stranger to this matter, and condescend to explain you self more particularly; and first give me leave to ask you what you mean by the knowing of God? Do you intend any thing more than the acknowledgment that there is a God?

Sebast. Yes, *Biophilus*, I here understand a great deal more by the knowing of God than I did in all our former Discourse whilst we were only laying the Foundations of Religion; there indeed no more was requir'd than to acknowledge his Being, and that because (as I then shew'd you) therein lies the first reason of such a thing as we call Religion. For there is nothing to oblige a Man to have any regard to himself, nor to make any difference of his Actions, till he acknowledge such a Being as hath a Sovereignty over him, and to whom he is accountable for his Carriage. But now

The necessity of studying to know the Divine Nature.

when that is resolv'd of, then there arises a two-fold

fold occasion of studying farther to know the God which he acknowledges to be ;

Namely, First, because it cannot but appear a point of great decency and regard towards this acknowledged Sovereign of the World , that we employ our minds, the noblest powers we have, in the study and contemplation of him ; and indeed to do otherwise is not only unmanly, but an Argument of such contempt as is not consistent with the real perswasion of such a Being as God.

Again, Secondly, Forasmuch as by the bare acknowledgment that there is a God, we see reason to make a difference of things, and to have a care of our Actions with respect to him ; so now when we are come to that, it will farther concern us in particular to have some rule and measure to govern our selves by, and whereby to make a Distinction of good and evil, to the end that we may please him in what we do : and that is only attainable by serious study of the Divine Nature, Attributes and such Declarations of his Mind and Will as he hath made.

For you must know that it is not every thing whatsoever we may fantasie, that will please him. For then all Religions would be alike true and safe, and none but Atheists and Hypocrites could miscarry. But it is certain God hath a mind of his own, and that Devotion or Observance only pleases him which is agreeable to him ; all other is foolish Superstition, and at best but lost labour.

Bioph. But I hope, after all, you do not intend to represent the Deity as a touchy and humourous kind of Being : for then consequently,

ly, Religion must needs be the most anxious thing in the World, and far from what you have hitherto made me believe it was.

Sebast. God forbid, *Biophilus*, that such a thought of the Divine Majesty should enter into any Man's Heart, or that I should be guilty of mis-representing Religion at that rate. As for God himself, he is certainly nothing else but wise and great Goodness, too great to be fondly taken with little things, and too wise and good to be offended with little things; and therefore Religion cannot consist in Niceties and Punctilio's, as if it was the servile flattery of a Tyrant, and not the ingenuous service of loyal Subjects to a brave and generous Prince; notwithstanding,

*The necessity of
studying to know the
Divine Will as well
as his Nature.*

as I said before, he hath a Mind and Will of his own, and expects that should be complied with, if we intend to procure his favour.

Bioph. But is it not enough that a Man live well and vertuously, and serve God devoutly? Will not that please and propitiate him to us.

Sebast. Yes doubtless it will, but still you must have a rule and a standard for all that; otherwise there will be no real difference of Virtue and Vice, nor no distinction between Superstition and Devotion.

Bioph. Now am I in a Wilderness, when I thought my self even at *Canaan*.

Sebast. Why, what's the matter, *Biophilus*? Could you think that mere good meaning, or any kind of blind Devotion would serve the turn? or that Man might prescribe to his Maker what he should be pleas'd withall?

Bioph.

Bioph. The matter is plainly this, *Sebastian*: I perceive that if a Man have a mind to be Religious, he shall be at a loss which way to take, and what to do; his own Conscience, you say, is not a sufficient Guide for him, because that may be mistaken, and therefore he must have a rule; well, to come by this rule; he must (say you) study to know God's Nature, and that is not enough, but God hath a Mind and Will of his own, and that must be known to; and that's not all neither, for he may alter his Mind, and then we are at a worse loss than ever: if therefore this be the state of the case, it is to no purpose to think or talk farther of this business.

Sebast. Come, cheer up Man, there is no danger of all this you dream of, this seeming difficulty will presently clear up, by that time I have told you, that God's Mind and Nature are so entirely the same, that whatsoever is agreeable to his Nature cannot be contradicted by any Act of his Will; and whatsoever is the express of his Will, is also a true Copy of his Nature (at least in the general.) And therefore if we perfectly understood the Divine Nature, there would be no need that he should make any Declaration of his Will; for then it would be the only instance of Religion to imitate and endeavour to resemble him, which is the truest honour that can be done to

him, and consequently could not fail to please him. But now forasmuch as we neither do nor can perfectly understand his Nature, because it is too great and too sublime for us to take a full

view

*The measures of
Devotion are partly
the Divine Nature,
and partly his Will.*

view of it, therefore it is that we stand in need of the Declaration of his Will for our guide in his service.

Bioph. If this be so (as it seems reasonable enough) then why did you speak of his Nature in this case, seeing the business lies in the studying of the Divine Will; at least, if there be any such thing as a Declaration of it which may be come at?

Sebast. The reason of my making mention both of the Divine Nature and the Divine Will to you in this case, will become as evident to you as any thing we have discoursed of, by that time you have considered these two things:

First, That forasmuch as natural light (which is the common Principle of Mankind) can make some discovery of the Nature of God to us, but little or nothing of his Will; therefore it is necessary, that such as have not Divine Revelation, should by the use of Reason study the Divine Nature for their guidance in the mean time.

Again, secondly, It is very considerable, that even those that live under the advantage of Divine Revelation, may be imposed upon by counterfeit Oracles, and such as falsely pretend to be discoverers of the Will of God, if they do not well study the Divine Nature, by the knowledge of which they may be able to detect such Frauds and Impostures; for if a Doctrine be broached in the World, that is contrary to the natural and reasonable Notions Men have of

God, although such Doctrine pretend never so much to Divinity; nay, if it should seem to have the same miraculous Attestation to it that

See Deuteronomy, 13. 1, 2, 3, &c.

that the Gospel it self hath, we may and ought to reject it upon this account, that we are sure nothing can come from God which contradicts himself, nor can there be any Declaration of his Will which is contrary to the known measures of his Nature : and therefore the Nature of God as well as the Will of God, is to be studied and attended to as our Rule in this great affair of Religion.

Bioph. Now I think I understand you thus far ; and if I be not mistaken, then I have two great things still to ask your assistance in : 1. That you will help me to understand the Divine Nature. 2. That you will direct me how I may come to the knowledge of his Will, by which two together I find I must be enabled both to please him and procure his favour ; and, first, I pray explain the Nature of God to me.

Sebast. I know you are a wiser Man than to expect from me that I should give you a perfect Definition of the Divine Majesty ; for by what hath been said already, you cannot but be sensible of the vanity and impossibility of such an attempt on my part, and consequently of the absurdity of such a demand on yours : but if your desire be (as I suppose it is) that I should represent God to you under such Expressions as that we may understand one another what we mean when we speak of him, and also may sufficiently distinguish him from all other Beings, then I doubt not to give you satisfaction.

Bioph. I ask you no more but what you promise, saving that I expect also that your De-

*A Description of
the Divine Nature.*

scription

scription of him should not only render him a fit Object of Religion, but also in some measure a Rule for it too, according to what you last discoursed.

Sebast. I understand you, and why may not these few words satisfy you, *viz. God is an Infinite and Eternal Spirit.*

Bioph. Ah, *Sebastian!* The words are few indeed, but they are such as will put you to the expence of a great many more before I shall understand them; every word is a Mystery, *Spirit, Eternal, Infinite.*

Sebast. Be of good courage, *Biophilus*, for though I foretold you we should never be able fully to comprehend the Divine Majesty, yet with a little Patience and Attention you shall find those Phrases very intelligible, and neither to be Nonsense or Gibberish, nor Cramp-words to conceal a conceited Ignorance under, as your old Friends the Epicureans are wont to call them.

Bioph. I confess you have not disappointed me hitherto, and therefore I will not despair, nor do I intend any longer to dispute with you, but to learn of you; therefore, I pray, in the first place, tell me plainly and intelligibly what a Spirit is, and what you mean when you say, God is a Spirit?

The word [Spirit] explained, and the nature of the thing.

Sebast. You may remember, that what you now demand was the Subject of part of our former Conference, wherein I indeavoured to settle the Notion of a Spirit, and not only to convince you of the necessity of acknowledging such a kind of Being, but also to possess

V. Conf. 2. from page 176. to pag. 179.

possess you with some apprehensions of the nature of it : and therefore, I hope, I shall not need to go over that again. But now ; when I call God a Spirit, I mean neither more nor less than this, namely, That *he is an understanding, free and powerfull Substance, which yet is not visible, nor can fall under the notice of our bodily Senses :* this, I take it, is the proper notion of a Spirit.

In the first place, I call a Spirit a *Substance*, that you may be sure I mean not a Spectre or Fantom (as your Friends use to suspect) but something which is as real as Matter or Body it self.

And yet, in the second place, to distinguish it from Matter or bodily Substance, I say, it is *not visible*, nor can fall under the notice of our bodily Senses, as that other kind of Substance doth, or at least is supposed to do.

And then, in the last place, to shew you that this is no contradiction, and to deliver you from the prejudice of Sense, I represent to you the *Effects and Operations* of a Spirit, which are such as must needs argue it to be a Substance, and an excellent one too ; namely, that it hath power to move the matter wherein it resides, and also hath Understanding and Will or Choice, which Matter is incapable of.

So that look what that thing which we call a Soul is in our selves, that doth this notion of Spirit imply God to be to the whole World ; namely, as by *that* we move our Bodies, and understand a reason for, and can give check to our own motion, so doth God preside over the World.

Bioph. I acknowledge you have delivered a consistent notion of such a thing as a Spirit, and therefore

therefore I see no impossibility that there should be such a thing. But how doth it appear that there is really and actually such a thing as a Spirit, or that if there be a God, he must needs be a Spirit?

Sebast. The reason is very plain by what hath been said already, when I proved to you the existence of a God. For there it was confessed on both hands, that something must be Eternal, or nothing could have been at all; and then I demonstrated that Matter could not be that Eternal Being, therefore it must be Spirit or nothing that gave Beginning to Things, and consequently this thing Spirit is not only a consistent Notion, but a necessary Reality, and God is that Spirit.

Besides, to convince you of this the more effectually, let me mind you of what, I think, I have heretofore observed, *viz.* That we find in our selves something which not only moves and acts our Bodies, but also sometimes bears hard against them; crosses and controls them in their Interests and Inclinations.

*The usefulness of
acknowledging God
to be a spiritual
Substance.*

Now surely that which doth so, must needs be something of an higher and different nature from them, and is no other than that kind of Spiritual Being which we call a Soul; and so you have another and more obvious Evidence of the actual existence of a Spiritual Substance

Bioph. I apprehend you, but, I pray, excuse me one Question more on this Point, and that is, What is the importance of this to Religion? Or of what influence will the acknowledgment of God to be a Spirit have upon the ruling and directing

directing a Man in his Devotions towards him ?

Sebast. The belief that God is a Spirit is of very great consequence to Religion upon several accounts.

Partly as it obliges us to be very sincere, hearty and inward in all our Devotions to him, and not think to put him off with Out-sides and Complements : for seeing *he is a Spirit, he will be worshipped in Spirit and Truth*, John, 4. 24.

Partly also as it renders it evident to us, that neither the sound of Words, nor any peculiar Posture, Ceremony, or other such like childish Trifles can of themselves be acceptable to him who is a great and a wise Spirit, no nor yet the Fat of Beasts, nor the Odours of sweet Incense, nor Gold, nor Silver, nor any of those things that are admired among Men; but least of all such sensual and lascivious Rites as were in use amongst the Pagans : for as none of the former can be suitable Oblations to such a pure Being ; so it is certain those last named can only besit an impure Spirit, such an one as the Devil is.

But principally, as it convinces us of the Vanity and Impiety of making Images of God, or of thinking to do honour to him by the use of them in his Worship, since he being a Spiritual Substance can by no means be represented by them, but must needs be debased and rendred much meaner to our thoughts than he is by such Representations; and therefore we find, that not only the Holy Scripture in the Books both of the Old and New Testament, utterly condemns such usages as Idolatrous and abominable to him; but we may also observe that amongst the Pagans themselves, all those who arrived at this

notion, that God was a Spirit, rejected Image-Worship, and thought that of the Mind and Spirit to be only acceptable to him.

To all which add, That the belief of the Spiritual Nature of God enables us more easily to conceive of the greatness of his Power, and that it is easie to him to mind and govern the World without trouble or weariness to himself, and with the greater advantage to us. For it is not imaginable that a perfectly immaterial Substance should be sensible of any lassitude or decay; and thus the belief of God's being a Spirit, confirms our trust in his Divine Providence which is the prime Spring and Motive of Devotion.

Bioph. I am abundantly satisfied that God is a Spirit, and that he ought to be so acknowledged. Now proceed, in the next place, to tell me what you mean when you say he is *Eternal*.

Sebast. By God's being an *Eternal* Spirit, I mean, that as he had no Beginning, so he can have no end of his Being, and that because (as I shewed you) he is necessarily, or could not but be; for we agreed even now that such an excellency of Being must be allowed to something or other, or else nothing could not have been at all, and I made it plain, that it could not be attributed to the World, or any part of it, and therefore must be due to God.

Bioph. I see I might have saved you the trouble of that Question, yet you will excuse it, since it leads me to another, which I cannot so well resolve without your help, *viz* of what moment is it to Religion whether God be acknowledged to be *Eternal* or not? *Se.*

Sebast. Oh ! Of very great moment; for, in the first place, this being acknowledged, we are thereby assured that all the inferiour Gods of the Gentiles, or whatsoever were either supposed to be born, or to have a beginning, or to die, or decline in Power and Divinity, could not be Gods, but the Idols of foolish and deluded Men; and at the same time we are as certain that the true God can neither do, nor be capable of any hurt or detriment, no nor of any change, but ever remains immutably the same. For whatsoever is liable to change, may also cease to be.

Again, Upon the Consideration of God's Eternity depends a great Obligation to Religion, forasmuch as by this means he hath it always in his power to reward or punish Men according to their Demerit, wherein consists a great Secret of his Providence, namely, the reason of his Patience and Long-suffering, that he doth not presently execute vengeance upon wicked Men, nor, on the other side, immediately deliver good Men out of the troubles and injuries they meet with in this World, because he hath it always in his power to do it, and if he do it not in this World, will be sure to do it in the next.

To both which may be added, That although the Notion of Eternity of time to come be a great deep into which we cannot look without Giddiness and Disturbance, yet we may be certain there is such a thing, because we are sure that God cannot cease to be, no more than he began to be; and therefore the solicitude which is in Men about what is to come after their deaths, is not the effect of timidity and weakness, (as you sometime suspected) but a rational and

well-grounded Prudence, as I then told you.

Bioph. But yet there is one very difficult thing remains to be explained, namely, what do you mean when you say God is an *Infinite Spirit*?

God's Infinity explained, and the use of believing it. *Sebast.* By that I mean, that whereas all other Beings (as well Spiritual as Material) which are not necessarily, or which might not have been, must consequently, whensoever they come into Being, depend upon him, who hath Being in himself, and so be limited and circumscribed by him; that is, they can have but only such a certain Portion of Power, Life and Understanding as he hath allotted them: on the contrary, he that was before all things, and the cause of all things, and who could not but be, must needs be unlimited in all kind of Perfections, forasmuch as there was nothing before him to limit him, nothing equal to him to rival him, nothing after him to intrench upon him, and consequently all conceivable Perfection must be essentially in him; that is, he must be most powerful, most wise, most just and most good, &c.

Bioph. I think I need not ask you of what importance this last point is to Religion, for (as dull as I am) I am aware that this Attribute of the Deity renders him the Object of our Admiration, Fear, Trust, and all other instances of Devotion.

Sebast. It is very true, *Biophilus*, and besides, by virtue of this Infinity he can be present to all places to take notice of all Passages; he can easily accomplish whatsoever he promises or threatens; he can be straitned in nothing, nor need any thing, having all things in himself, and consequently

quently of that, it is impossible to conceive of him as a stingy, narrow-hearted Being that can envy or malign his Creatures, but contrariwise, he must be unspeakably good, and take delight in nothing more than in communicating of his own fulness to them.

But that which I would especially remark, is this, That a being infinite in Goodness, Wisdom, &c. as aforesaid, can never be the Author of absurd, or harsh and impossible Laws; for any such would be a Contradiction to the aforementioned Perfections of his Nature: and therefore as we have upon this account great Obligations to serve him chearfully; so we may assure our selves that whatsoever pretends to be a Divine Law, and can be made appear to be inhumanely rigorous, or intolerably difficult to be observed, is either no Law of his, or at the least it is not rightly interpreted.

And thus, I hope, I have, in some measure, explained to you the Nature of God, and also led you to observe the main strokes of Piety, or the Laws of natural Religion towards him, deducible from those Principles: and you your self by attentive Consideration, may be able to deduce many others of like nature. What other service do you now command me?

Bioph. After hearty thanks, good *Sebastian*, for the mild and candid treatment you have given me all along, which together with that clearness of reason which shines out in your Discourse, have made me perfectly yours, I would in the next place request of you (if I be not too importunately troublesome) that you will in like manner discourse to me of the Divine Will,

as you have done of his Nature; that so I may be more fully instructed in this great business.

Sebast. I shall never think it troublesome, or unseasonable to serve you in such an affair as this; but, *Biophilus*, if we should go no farther, and that I had nothing to say concerning Divine Revelation, yet you see we have enough already to render Religion not only worthy of a Prudent Man's care, but to be the most reasonable and necessary thing in the whole World: so that Atheism with all its boasts of Wit and extraordinary Sagacity, and Scepticism too with all its Caution and Reservedness, are quite beaten out of the Field.

Bioph. I acknowledge it, good *Sebastian*, with Glory to God, and Shame enough to my self—

Sebast. God be thanked for this gentle Thaw, and the prospect we have of a fruitfull Season after the cold Weather.

Bioph. I observe no change in the Air; but however, good *Sebastian*, let not the thoughts of that divert you from what we were upon.

Sebast. Never fear it, Sir, I am mindfull of you, and glad to see you so earnestly inquisitive after that you was so cold towards, and so incurious of heretofore. But what was you about to say?

Bioph. I remember you said that humane reason was too short to be a Standard for God Almighty, and that if it was possible for us perfectly to understand the Divine Nature (which we cannot) yet since he is a free Agent,

*Concerning the
knowledge of the
Divine Will.*

Agent, and hath a Mind of his own, and will not be prescribed to by us, it is necessary in order to the pleasing and propitiating him towards our selves, that we should some way or other be more particularly instructed concerning his Will and Pleasure: now therefore my desire is (if it be possible) to be ascertained of the Divine Will, that I may know how to carry my self agreeably thereunto.

Sebast. It is a worthy Resolution of yours, and a very noble inquiry that hath taken rise from thence, and let me add, it is such an inquiry as you may justly expect Satisfaction in: for since natural reason and industry cannot give us sufficient light in the case, it is not consistent with the Divine Goodness to leave Men destitute of some certain way of Information, what he requires and expects from them: And that it is possible for God to supply that defect of our understanding, there can be no doubt, since it cannot be imagined that Almighty Power and Wisdom should ever want means to express his Sense to the Sons of Men, or to assure them that such is indeed his Mind without all danger of Imposture or Delusion.

Bioph. But what I now understand of the Divine Nature, I cannot but grant it very possible for God to do so; and I insist upon the fitness and reasonableness that some such thing should be done: but I inquire where is it done, and how may a Man have recourse to it?

Sebast. First let me ask you what ways are there imaginable that might give you or any other Man Satisfaction in this case? and what are those you could think fit for God to make use of to this purpose?

*Several ways of
Divine Revelati-
on.*

Bioph. I could think of several ways whereby God might, if he please, make known his Mind to Men; namely, I doubt not but he can, if he will, speak from Heaven in an audible Voice, so that we shall hear him as we hear one another; or if he thought good to condescend so far, he could personally appear in the World, and instruct Men in what he requires of them; again, he could singly apply himself to particular Persons, and by some secret Operations of his, insill his Mind into their Hearts; or to name no more, he could guide the thoughts and hands of some certain Men, whilst they committed his Will to Writing, which should be a Record and Digest of the Divine Laws to all Ages of the World.

Sebast. Very good: Then I hope it will abundantly satisfy you, if I shew you that God hath not only made use of some one or other of these ways you mention, but hath by all and every one of them notified his pleasure at some time or other to the Sons of Men.

As for instance, In the first Ages of the World, before there were any Divine Laws settled for the conduct of Mens Lives, it was not unusual with the Divine Majesty to give particular Intimations of his Mind, especially in such cases as the use of natural Reason could not extend to; and those that were extraordinary good Men, had very frequent experience of this in those ancient times, and even the better sort of Heathens were not destitute of such special discoveries of God's Will (amongst other occasions to supply the defects of Humane Reason in
Divine

Divine things) and there is nothing more known and acknowledged amongst them than this.

And then it is also certain, that though God as a Spirit hath properly no Voice of his own, yet he hath several times framed a Voice, and caused it to be heard from Heaven as his, the famous instance whereof was at the giving of Laws to the Jewish Nation from Mount *Sinai*; nor have later times (no not amongst the Pagans themselves) been altogether left without such prodigious discoveries of the Divine Will, unless we call in Question the credit of all their Writings.

But for God's condescending to come himself into the World, and to instruct Men in such things as are agreeable to his Will, this was most gloriously verified in the Conversation of our Saviour Christ Jesus in Humane Nature upon Earth, who had all the Attestations to his Divinity that could be desired, both in the Wonders of his Birth, the Miracles of his Life, and the Glories of his Resurrection, but especially in the frequent and humble Ministry of Angels to him as occasion served. And he familiarly and fully interpreted the Mind of God to Men; and the more to awaken the Attention of Mankind to him, a Voice from Heaven also attended his entrance on this Office, *Matthew*, 3. 17.

And then in the last place, for God's declaring his Mind to us by the Ministry of Men, this he hath abundantly done in the Books of Holy Scripture, which as they were dictated by himself to those Holy Men that composed them, so they have been carefully preserved by his

his special Providence from the changes and corruption that all Humane things are liable to, that so they might convey his Pleasure to all Persons, Climates and Ages of the World.

Bioph. But do you mean that a Man may consult which of these Oracles and when he pleases, for a Resolution in any matter of difficulty that occurs in the business of Religion.

Sebast. No indeed, *Biophilus*, that you must not expect, but must content your self only with the last of the four, namely, the Holy Scripture, that is the standing and *lively Oracle of God*, and *more sure than a Voice from Heaven*, Heb. 5. 12. 2 Pet. 1. 18, 19.

Bioph. But may I not ask, why might not some of those other Declarations of the Divine Mind have been continued as well as that of the Scripture, especially either a Voice from Heaven, or some immediate impress of God Almighty upon the Minds of Men, if it had been but for the Attestation to, and fuller Confirmation of the Bible, and the written way of Divine Revelation?

Sebast. Nay, *Biophilus*, we must not ask God a reason of that, but be thankfull to him for what he hath afforded us, especially since that is as much as is necessary for our guidance: for those that *hear not Moses and the Prophets*, *neither will they hear if one rose from the Dead*, Luke 16. 31. much less if they heard a Voice from Heaven.

*The reason of the
surcease of Voices
from Heaven and
special Oracles.*

Nevertheless I must tell you,
I do not think it altogether
impossible to give a modest
man more particular satisfacti-

on

on in this case, for there were apparently special reasons why God should make such special and prodigious discoveries of himself in former times as he doth not make now-a-days, namely, because for a good part of the Age of the World there was no written Law, and so God must apply himself to Men in some extraordinary way, or they would have had no Instruction in his Will at all. And then after that the Law was given by Voice from Heaven on Mount *Sinai*, and written on Tables of Stone, it was in it self so imperfect a draught of the Divine Mind, and for the most part so accommodated to the weakness of that People, and to the infancy of the World, that it would have been hard to have kept a Man of any Sagacity in a constant belief of it as coming from God, if he had not continually and from time to time made prodigious Attestations to it: But now especially since our Saviour came into the World, and we have the Books of the New Testament, as well as of the Old, there is so full a Declaration of the Divine Mind, and that not in Types and Figures neither, but in so plain a way, and with so much agreeableness of the things discovered to the Reason of Mankind; that there is no need of any secondary Attestation, nor any thing more than that it appears that those Writtings were indited by God.

Besides, it is to be considered that the way of giving answer by a Voice from Heaven, unless it had been granted to every Man (and then it must have been done almost every day and hour, and in every part of the World also) could not have given better satisfaction to the generality
of

of Men (I mean to such as were not Ear-witnesses of such a Voice) than this way of Scripture doth : for without infinite and continual Miracles, it must have been their lot and duty to believe without hearing such a Voice.

And for that other way of *secret intimation* of God's Mind to the Minds of Men by a private and particular Oracle, it is plain that it could go no farther than to satisfy that particular Person to whom such answer was given ; and therefore was only fit to be made use of in extraordinary cases, and upon some extraordinary Persons, and even then there was need of some Miracle to attend such intimations, in order to the securing the Minds of such Men from the delusions of the Devil, or their own Fancies : and when that was done, this discovery could go no farther than the Person to whom it was particularly made ; for it *was like the white stone which no man knew but he that received it* Rev. 2. 17. The rest of Mankind could have no other advantage by it, nor be better secured of the Oracle, than we are of what we learn by the Holy Scripture, no nor so well neither, as you will see by and by, if you please.

Bioph. With all my Heart, for that is the very point I desire to be resolved in ; but in order thereto, first, let me intreat you to explain what you mean by this way of Divine Legislation, or this way of delivering the Will of God by the Writings of the Holy Scripture.

Sebast. The way is this :
 Divine Wisdom resolving to give a standing Law and Guide to Mankind, in the first place, inspired

What is meant by God's inditing the Holy Scripture, and the reasonable use of it.

inspired certain Holy Men, that is, made clear Impressions of his own Sentiments upon their Minds, and then also guided and governed them in the writing and publishing the aforesaid Impressions for the use of others.

That it is easie for God Almighty to imprint his own sense upon the Minds of such Men as he shall chuse for that purpose, you cannot doubt when you consider that Power of his which he displayed in the Creation, and that therefore the Minds of Men must needs be *in his hands, as clay in the hands of the potters*, so that he can mould and figure them as he pleases.

That he can give assurance to the Minds of such Men, that it is he himself that makes those Impressions upon them, and no other Agent, you have acknowledged already; and there can be no more cause to doubt it, than you have, whether it be I that speak to you or a Spirit out of the Wall: for certainly God hath ways enough to distinguish himself and his Motions from Illusions.

That also he should be able to guide and govern those Holy Pen-men in the writing of what he himself had put into their Minds, and in delivering

his sense so fully and clearly as to answer his end, and become a sufficient Rule for Men to govern themselves by, must be granted, or you make him more impotent than a Man.

Lastly, That he could by his Providence preserve the Books so written from being imbezell'd or corrupted, that so they may answer the ends aforesaid, cannot be denied without denying his Providence,

The Holy Scripture is the supply of the defects of Natural Reason.

Providence, and subverting the Foundation of Religion.

So that in sum, this way of the Holy Scripture must needs be a very sufficient way of Divine Legislation, and an abundant supply of the Defects of Natural Reason in Divine Things.

Bioph. I grant all you have hitherto said, which amounts to no more but *this*, That it is not impossible for God to do so; but now the question is, How shall it appear that (*de facto*) he hath done? or (which amounts to the same thing) how do you prove that those Books (commonly call'd the Bible) are indeed what they pretend to be?

Sebast. There lies the pinch of the business indeed, as you well observe; and therefore, in order to your full satisfaction in that point, let me desire you to lay together the four following Particulars.

The proof of the Divine Authority of the Books of Holy Scripture.

First, it cannot be denied but that the Books of Holy Scripture are (at least generally speaking) the most Ancient Monuments in the whole World. Wherefore, besides the Veneration which we commonly allow to Antiquity, it is apparent that they have endured the Test of all times past, and that all the Wit of Man hath not been able hitherto to find any considerable flaw in them, and consequently their Authority and Credibility is so much greater than any other Books, by how much the time is longer since they were written and published; for there have not been wanting those that have endeavoured to expose them, and if they had been
able

able to have done it, doubtless long ere this time, these Books had lost all their Veneration: But since they still retain their Dignity and Esteem (notwithstanding all efforts of their Enemies to the contrary) there is ground enough to believe they never shall be able to do it, and consequently that there can be no reasonable Suspicion of the truth of them.

To which may be added, That since Divine Providence hath also so long preserved and watched over these Writings, it is very natural to collect that therefore they are such as he peculiarly owns and recommends to us.

Secondly, It is to be considered that the Doctrine of these Books is perfectly agreeable to the natural Notions we have of God, and therefore being fit for him to be the Author of, they must consequently be fit for us to entertain, as coming from him, at least upon reasonable evidence of fact that they did so.

If indeed any Man could justly charge these Writings as containing any thing absurd or impossible, or make appear that they countenanced such things as are disagreeable to what we naturally know of God, or can discern to be in him by the best improvement of our Understanding: Then (as I have granted before) we could not be bound to believe them, although they should be supposed to have all the Confirmation imaginable; for no Man can believe what he will, nor be obliged to act contrary to the natural Sense and Principles of his Mind, upon any Authority whatsoever.

But whensoever a Doctrine is propounded that is reasonable in it self, and besides hath reasonable

sonable evidence that it came from God, and is part of his revealed Will, then it is highly reasonable that we should receive it as such, notwithstanding some trifling Objections which may be to the contrary.

Thirdly, It is especially to be minded that the Doctrine of the Holy Scripture hath not wanted such special assurances that it came from God, as were fit for him to give, or for Men to expect. For all those Holy Men that delivered any part of it to the World, were abetted by Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of what they so delivered: so that either God Almighty must be supposed to set the Seal of his Omnipotency to a Falshood, or else these Doctrines are the discoveries of the Mind of God.

Now that there was such miraculous proof, we may be assured in the general by this Consideration, that it is not imaginable that such Doctrine and such Books should have obtained that credit in the times when they were set on foot, without such Confirmation, especially since the matter of those Writings in a great part was so very different from the Notions, and Practices, and Interests of those Ages and Persons to whom they were published. " Inso-
 " much that (as a great Man said of old) " to
 " suppose the World to be brought to the re-
 " ception of these Doctrines without a Miracle,
 " might justly seem the greatest Miracle that e-
 " ver was.

And in particular, that the Books of the Old Testament had such Divine Attestation, the very Books themselves frequently appeal to, or at least give us the History of such things of this kind

kind as could neither be withstood and denied by the Men of the present Age when they were done, nor confuted by those that came after; besides the famous Spirit of Prophecy, which displayed it self all along those times (of which more by and by.)

And then for the New Testament, besides all the Miracles wrought by our Saviour and his Apostles, that one of his Resurrection was a thing both so notorious to be observed, and so easie to have been confuted if it had been false, that there is no colour of reason to doubt of it, and consequently none to doubt of his Doctrine; and then in the Apostles times, that miraculous ability of speaking with all kind of Tongues, which was suddenly bestowed upon the Christians on the famous days of *Pentecost*, *Act. c. 2. v. 1.* was a thing equally stupendious in it self, and irrefragable in its Evidence of the Christian Religion.

Now I have shewed you before, that whatsoever point hath been once sufficiently proved, it must be true for ever, and there can be no reason to expect after Miracles for Confirmation of it.

Lastly, It is observable that the several parts of Holy Scripture, I mean the Books of the Old and New Testament, (as they are usually distinguished) do, like a pair of Indentures, justify one another, and assure us that there can be no fraud nor forgery in either of them; for besides that, they bearing witness to one another, one of them cannot be false, unless the other be so too; and if either of them be proved by Articles, the other would be fully assured by

the same means, although it had no Miracles peculiar to it self.

Besides this I say, it is in the first place, certain that these several Books, or Parts of Holy Scripture were written and published in several Ages of the World which were very remote from each other, and consequently by such Men as could possibly hold no correspondence or confederacy with each other.

And then again, secondly, it is as plain also that (for instance) the Old Testament foretels, many Ages before, what things should come to pass many Ages after; wherefore if those things come to pass accordingly, there can be no doubt but God inspired those Men that prophesied those things: and if the New Testament, on the other side, contain a Relation of such Events as fully answer to those Predictions, then are both of them most certainly true.

And now laying these four things together, and only setting aside the demand of present and daily Miracles, which I have shewed to be unreasonable to expect, I pray tell me, *Biophilus*, what farther evidence can any ingenuous Man require in such a case as this is?

Bioph. To speak the truth from my Heart, I cannot tell.

Sebast. Why then I hope, *Biophilus*, you think your self now concerned in those sacred Records, and for the time to come will make them a principal part of your study, especially the New Testament.

Bioph. I plainly see I ought to do so; but why do you lay the Emphasis especially on the New Testament?

Sebast.

Sebast. For no less reason than because that part of Holy Scripture contains the clearest and fullest discovery of the Mind of God, as being the ultimate and most perfect Declaration of himself, made by the very Son of God in humane Nature.

Bioph. I am hitherto an utter stranger to the Contents of those Books; (to my shame be it spoken) I pray therefore, give me in short the Summ of them.

Sebast. Nay, for that you must excuse me, and let me by all means advise you to study the Books themselves, they are easie to be had, and I can assure you, you will receive greater Satisfaction, and profit more by that course than by any Epitome I can make of them.

The Sum of the New Testament.

Beoph. Nay, good *Sebastian*, it is not my Intention to decline the reading of the New Testament, but you perceive I have lost too much time already, therefore let me again request you to give me (at least) a compendious view of the principal things contained in these Writings.

Sebast. Since you will have it so, I comply with your desires, and as far as I can comprehend so great and weighty a Subject, and so full a Writing in my Mind, I must tell you, *The New Testament* principally consists of these three things.

First, an exact and excellent rule of Holy Living, by conforming our selves to which, we shall most certainly please God, and most effectually procure his Favour.

Secondly, The most powerfull and effectual motives to provoke us to an uniform and thorough

rough Compliance with the aforesaid Rule.

Thirdly, The most proper means and assistances to that end, that so we may not only be encouraged to undertake, but inabled to accomplish that Holy course which is propounded and prescribed.

This (I take it) is a Summary of the whole Gospel, at least (as I said) the principal Contents of it.

For by the first of these Particulars we have a Law given us to guide our Consciences, and a generous Model or Design of raising and improving the state of Mankind.

By the second our Affections are inflamed, and our endeavours encouraged proportionably to the design aforesaid, and by the last particular our infirmities are relieved, and we are assured of attaining that glorious Design if we be not wanting to our selves.

Bioph. I wonder in my heart what made you so unwilling to gratifie this request of mine; by this little glimpse which you have now afforded me, I see plainly that those Books contain a very admirable Institution, unless it be that you have some strange Art in representing things, and raising ones Opinion.

Sebast. No, assure your self, *Biophilus*, there is no art in the case, but the mere excellency of Christianity appearing in its genuine *Colours*, as you will be more thoroughly convinced when you have studied it well, and especially have made experiment of it in practice.

Bioph. As cold and diffident as my temper hath been hitherto, I am now on the sudden inflamed, and I am enamoured on this Idea of Religion

Religion you speak of: pray therefore explain these things more fully to me; and first I desire to know more particularly what the peculiar Laws and Rules of this Institution are.

*The peculiar Laws
of the Christian Re-
ligion.*

Sebast. For that, *Biophilus*, you must know, that this Institution of the Gospel, being (as I said) the last and ultimate Revelation of the Divine Will, must consequently be more exact and perfect than any other; yet notwithstanding it is not destructive, but only perfective of those that went before it: and therefore, as it contradicts no former Prophecy or Revelation of God's Will; so it repeals no Law of Nature or Reason, derogates from no Rule of Piety, Gratitude, Civility or Humanity, but only adds to them and improves them; for so our Saviour himself hath told us, *He came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them.* Matth. 5. 17. So that indeed the Christian Institution is a pandect or digest of all that is *grave, decent, prudent, vertuous, or Praise-worthy*, Phil. 4. 8. all which things it not only re-inforces by more powerfull Arguments (as I will shew you by and by) but requires every of them in greater Perfection. But now the Supplement or Addition it makes to all those, is that which is to be called the peculiar Character of this Religion, and that, I think, may be reduced to these three Heads.

First, It enjoins a more excellent and spiritual Worship of God.

Secondly, A more refined Purity of Heart and Life.

I 3

Thirdly,

Thirdly, A more noble, generous, and diffusive Charity.

1. The Gospel prescribes a more Spiritual Worship than was in use in the World before; for our Saviour expressly affirms, *The time now comes when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and truth*, and gives the reason, *because God is a Spirit*, &c. Joh. 4 23, 24. It is true,

*More Spiritual
Worship peculiarly
required by the Go-
spel.*

God ever was a Spirit, and it is impossible he should ever have been otherwise (as I have shown you before) but his Spiritual Nature was not so well understood heretofore, whilst he was wont to represent himself by Fire, or in humane shape amongst Men: and whilst he required to have a Temple built for his residence, as if he required an External State of Grandeur or bodily accommodation; and lastly, whilst he required Sacrifices and Oblations to be made to him of such things as are of value amongst Men, as if he was a necessitous Deity, and used to eat and drink as his Worshippers do. But now, since he hath given proof of his mighty Majesty, without those visible appearances, and the Sons of Men are better instructed that he is a pure Spirit without all mixture of Matter, and infinitely full, perfect and happy in himself, without any Accession of other things to him: Henceforth he will not be worshipped with the steams of Blood and Fat, nor pleased with clouds of Incense, but with hearty Adorations, with raised Affections, with the Contemplations of pure Minds, with inward Reverence and Admiration of him, with devout Prayers and Praises

ses offered to him, with Love, with Trust and Confidence in him, and endeavours of conforming our selves to him ; This is the Worship that is suitable to a good, and happy, and a spiritual Being, yet not excluding bodily Expressions of Reverence neither, but as principally requiring the former, and making this latter only the accessary and effect of that.

2. The Gospel requires a more refined Temper of Heart and Life than was usually practised, or easie to be arrived at before ; namely, it prescribes

Purity of Heart is another great and peculiar Law of Christianity.

to our inward Man as well as our outward Actions, and that our Hearts be pure as well as our bodily Members ; that our Reason have the mastery of our Lusts and Passions, so that we neither indulge our sensuality in the intemperate use of Pleasure, nor live as if we were born to eat and drink, but be in some measure above the gusto and relish of bodily entertainments ; that we subdue our Passions and Inclinations to Anger and Revenge, and soar above the tempest of this World, so as to despise the usual cares and fears, and sollicitudes of the present Life, and enjoy our selves in a kind of Divine Tranquility and Security.

The generality of Mankind, both Jews and Pagans, thought it a mighty felicity to hoard up Riches, to grasp Civil Power, a ravishing thing to swim in sensual Pleasures, and nothing was counted either more sweet or more brave than to revenge a Man's self when he thought he was affronted ; but as the Glory of all these things is faded by the light of the Gospel, so the desires

of them are to be mortified by the Laws of Christianity ; the Mind is to be freed of these sordid entertainments, and to be taken up with more pure and spiritual Delights, with intellectual Pleasures, with the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge, with the Glory of Conquest (not over other Men, but) over our selves, our brutal Lusts, with the Joys of God's Favour, and the peace of our own Conscience.

Universal Charity another peculiar Law of the Christian Religion.

3. And lastly, This Religion requires a larger Spirit, and a more noble and diffusive Charity than agrees with the common Standard of the World, or than was prescribed by any other Religion. The Charity of a Pagan commonly extended no farther than his Family and Friends, or at most to his own City and Country ; and that of the Jews to their own Nation and Religion only : but to love their Enemies was by both of them look'd upon as so far from necessary, that it was thought impossible and absurd. Whereas this Institution requires us to love our very Enemies, and those that mortally hate us ; to render good for evil ; to embrace all the World in our Affections ; to look upon all Mankind as our Brethren, the Children of one common Parent ; that there be no Men so silly or peevish, so mean and contemptible, or so remote from us in Blood, Countrey, Manners or Opinion, but we be ready to do all good Offices towards them ; to oblige them by kindness ; and to conquer and over-power them by real instances of good Will and indearing Carriage. This (as I take it) is the Summ of the Christian Law, and

and the peculiar Character of that Religion, at least, so far as concerns the rule of living.

Bioph. You have thus far, I confess, described a very brave Institution, but sure all this is only matter of speculation, or at most a draught of some Monastick Order; it is possible perhaps in their retired way of living (where they are free from the temptations and provocations that are incident to other Men) something at this rate may be pretended to, or at least dreamed of, but sure these Laws are too strict to be practicable, or indeed possible to the generality of Mankind, and then according to your own rule they cannot come from God, who must be supposed so wise as to know what Men are capable of performing, and to be too just to require impossibilities.

Sebast. You will better judge of that matter by and by, when you have considered the Motives and Assistances this Religion affords, as well as the Rules it prescribes: for you know that things of this nature are difficult or easie in proportion to the encouragements to undertake and consist with them. Great rewards raise great Spirits, and you can never tell what any Man will come to, till you understand what Inducements and Motives he shall be acted by: now by that time you have heard what remains to be said concerning the Christian Religion, I do not doubt but you will pronounce it to be every whit as fecible in practice as noble in speculation.

Bioph. You say right; for God's sake therefore go on and in the next place repre-

The peculiar Motives or Encouragements of the Gospel.

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sent to me the inducements the Gospel affords a Man to live at such a rate as you have spoken of.

Sebast. Why then, the second thing remarkable in the Gospel is, the powerfull Motives it makes use of to provoke Men to an uniform compliance with its Laws, and they are especially these three.

First, It charms Men by a lively draught of the Divine Goodness.

Secondly, It provokes them by the Example of our Saviour.

Thirdly, It inflames them by the promise of Eternal Life.

The first Motive is the Divine Goodness lively and powerfully set forth in the Gospel.

I. The Gospel makes so lively a Representation of the Divine Goodness and Clemency, especially in the free Pardon and total Abolition of all Sin past (upon Condition of a generous Piety and Vertue for the time to come) that it powerfully works upon Mens ingenuity, and melts them into a compliance with the most difficult terms that such Goodness can be capable of propounding to them and requiring of them. Do but think with your self, if you had so far offended your Prince and violated the Laws of your Country, that Majesty was exasperated, and justice armed with severity against you, so that you was under a terrible Sentence, and expected a speedy Execution; now in this case if notwithstanding your Prince should condescend to make you an offer of Pardon and full restitution to your former capacity, upon certain terms; Would not you (I say) be willing to enter upon

on a very difficult Service, and undertake the most hazardous Enterprize? Would you then be nice and captious, or stand carping and capitulating? Nay, would you not be inflamed with Resolution, spirited by Gratitude, and find your self to become more than your self, in such an undertaking?

Now this is the case, *Biophilus*: we have infinitely offended Almighty God in the whole course of our Lives, and so are justly fallen under his Displeasure, insomuch that a Sentence of Eternal Death is pass'd against us? notwithstanding, in the Gospel an Overture of Reconciliation is made, and upon those terms I mentioned even now, he offers to receive us into Favour, that all our Sins, how many and great soever, shall be blotted out, and never come in remembrance again; the Sentence shall be revoked; we shall never be upbraided with our Follies; no cloud shall hang over us; no ill Character be upon us; but our Consciences shall be quiet, and God Almighty will everlastingly shine upon us. Now can any Man in this case expostulate the terms with God Almighty? Can he find in his Heart to complain of the trouble of his Service, the difficulty of a Self-denial, or think it hard to be obliged to forgive other Men upon condition of God's forgiving him? No surely: he will heartily embrace the Propositions; he will love and thank God with all his Soul, and rejoyce in difficulty itself, that he may give proof of his gratitude, and be only sorry that he can give no better evidence of it: in a word, he will be inflamed in his Resolutions, and winged in his endeavours of serving and
pleasing

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pleasing such a God : a God of Mercy, rich in Mercy and Goodness, pardoning Iniquity, Transgression and Sin ; forgiving old and great and the most dis-ingenuous Sinners.

Bioph. Oh! *Sebastian*, you break my Heart : enough, enough ; I cannot forbear —

*The Example of
our Saviour another
Gospel-motive.*

Sebast. The second Motive of the Gospel is the Example of our Saviour himself : this it sets before us, and by this it provokes us to compliance with the Laws aforesaid. That he was the very Son of God, the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Character of his Majesty, Heb. 1. 2. I have intimated before, and all the miraculous Glories of his Birth, Life, Resurrection and Ascension to Heaven have abundantly demonstrated it ; now that He should come down from Heaven to Earth, and there frame himself to an exact conformity to the aforesaid Laws of the Gospel, is not a greater instance of his admirable Self-humiliation than of the incomparable Excellency, Wisdom and Goodness of those Laws, in that they are such as God himself thought fit to be subject to them himself, as well as to recommend them to us.

For now certainly no man can be so prodigiously absurd, as to account it a mean drudgery to be conversant in that way of worshipping God which the Gospel teaches, seeing Christ Jesus himself made it not only his business but his delight.

No man surely can think himself hardly used, if he be a little restrained in the use of bodily Pleasures, since the Son of God, when he

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was in humane Flesh, disdained them.

No Man can be so fond as to admire Riches, and Honours, and the Preferments of this World, which our Saviour could have had in the greatest measure that is imaginable, if he had not despised them: no Man can be so madly passionate, as to think that to revenge himself is a great point of Glory, and that it is unmanly to omit it, when he observes the Son of God, who could have done it effectually, instead thereof, only praying for his Enemies: nor can any man be so mean-spirited as either to be vainly puffed up with Prosperity, or sink under Adversity, Reproach, or the deepest Contempt imaginable, that sees the Son of God to be the poorest, meanest, and most ignominiously treated of all Men.

Besides, it is farther considered that there is no colour for any Man to pretend an impossibility of the thing, or impotency in himself to perform any of the forementioned, or any other duty of Christianity, since our Saviour performed them all in humane Nature, wherein he was subject to the same infirmities, assaulted with the same temptations, and pressed with the same necessities that we are; he had the same Flesh and Blood, felt the same pains, was hungry, thirsty and weary, as we are, and so there is no excuse to be made in our case that would not have been as reasonable in his.

Now all this considered (together with the mighty power of example in general, as that it takes away the pretence of Ignorance, baffles the Plea of Impotency, shames Cowardice, and kindles Emulation) cannot but have the force
of

of a mighty Motive, and prevail upon all ingenuous Persons *to cast away every weight and the sin that besets them, and to run with Patience and Courage the Race set before them, Heb. 12. 1.*

The promise of eternal life the principal Motive of the Gospel.

3. But the third and most powerfull Motive of the Gospel is yet behind, and that is the promise of Eternal Life to all those that frame themselves

by the Rules aforesaid. And that whereas the best that other Men can hope for, is, to rot in their Graves, and everlastingly to be forgotten (but that will not serve their turn, for they shall certainly suffer the vengeance of Eternal Fire;) Those, on the contrary, that live by the Laws of the Gospel, shall be raised again out of the Dust, and out-live the very Heavens in unspeakable and endless Felicity.

That this is not a Dream, but a real Truth you may be thus assured. First, For the possibility of it, because I have shewed you already that God is a necessary Being, and must live for ever; and therefore he that had it in his power to make things out of nothing, cannot want ability to preserve such things in being as it pleaseth him. And then, Secondly, that he will do so, is the great promise of the Gospel, which he delivered by his own Son, and *whereof he hath given assurance in that he raised him from the Dead, Act. 17. 31.*

Now, *Biophilus*, this is such a thing, this Living for ever, I say, is such a Motive, that it is able to make a Man to defie all difficulty so far as even to be inflamed the more by the apprehension of it, and to stick at nothing but flat impossibility;

impossibility; but never any Man yet had the folly to object that in the case: it may be said to be difficult to maintain a constant attendance upon God's Worship, a little uneasie to deny our present delight and pleasure, something against the Grain to stifle our passions, and to lay aside revenge; but never any body said or thought any of them to be absolutely impossible.

For it is plain in experience that many Men have undergone greater hardships, than any are required in the Gospel, either to demonstrate their Love, or to pursue their Passion; in compliance with their Fears, or for the sake of their Interests; sometimes out of Flattery, and sometimes out of mere Reverence of some Person; but at any time for self-security and preservation: Now whatsoever may be done upon these inconsiderable grounds, most certainly cannot be impossible to be done when Eternal Life is at stake: and this being, as I have said, plainly propounded in the Gospel as the great Wager to him that runs that Race, and withall being impossible to be obtained upon any other terms, must needs make *the Yoke of Christ* seem (at least comparatively) *easy, and his Burthen light*, Matt. 11. 30. And so much for the second principal point of Christianity.

Bioph. Now, *Sebastian*, you have increased my wonder more than ever, though, I must confess, you have translated it to another subject; forasmuch as whereas I suspected before the possibility of complying with those strict Laws of the Gospel, now I am as much amazed that any body should complain of difficulty in them, those things considered which you have last represented.

Sebast.

Sebast. God be thanked for that change, *Bio-philus*, but your wonder of the second sort will be yet heightened, when you consider also the assistances that the Gospel affords us towards the performance of what it requires, which is the third and last of those things whereby I designed to represent the summ of it to you; and (to be short) that consists principally in these two things.

The Assistances and Helps which the Gospel affords towards the performing of its Laws. First, the co-operation of the Holy Spirit.

1. The inward assistance and co-operation of God's Holy Spirit.

2. The outward advantages of the Society of his Church.

First, He that by his Son hath required such things of us as the aforesaid, namely, Spiritual Worship, Purity of Heart, and universal Charity, hath also promised by his Divine Power to co-operate with us in the discharge of them, and then there can be no such thing as impossibility, nor scarcely so much as difficulty in the case: for what is impossible to Almighty Power? Or what burthen can there be to complain of, when we have such an helper?

But the meaning of this is not, that God will do all for us without us, so as that we shall be only passive, and recipients of his Impressions, as some have very absurdly fancied: for then all the Acts of Piety and Vertue would be more properly God's Acts than ours, and could be capable of no praise or reward as proceeding from us: and besides, this could not be called Divine Assistance, but his Creation rather, since
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in such an exertion of his own Omnipotency, he did wholly over-bear or supersede our endeavours.

But the meaning is this, That whensoever any Man (in Contemplation of the Motives and Incouragements aforesaid) sets himself in earnest to comply with that which God by the Laws of the Gospel hath made to be his duty, from thenceforth he shall not only have the benefit of a common Providence in upholding and strengthening the Powers of his Mind, nor only find the effects of a more especial Providence in removing Obstacles, and making his way easie to him, but by the vital Power and Efficacy of the Divine Spirit his Mind shall be more enlightened to see the excellency of the thing he goes about; his Will shall be confirmed and strengthened in its choice and resolution; his Affections quickned in the pursuit and execution of that choice: and above all, his Heart shall be cheared in the whole enterprise with unspeakable Joy, and many times with an admirable and ravishing prospect of the glory that shall attend and crown his performance.

This our Saviour promised to the Christian Church before he left the World and ascended to Heaven, viz. That he would this way be *present with them to the end of the World*, Matth. 28. 20. and hereof he gave a great earnest when on the famous day of *Pentecost* (Acts 2. 1. the Holy Spirit came in a very prodigious manner upon all the Apostles and Christians that were assembled together as the Representative and Seminary of his future Church; and it was done (amongst other reasons) to give as-

surance that he was mindfull of his promise, and that all Ages after might justly expect the presence of his Spirit with them (though not so visible as in that extraordinary instance) which accordingly good Men at all times find true by comfortable experience.

Bioph. This which you now tell me is the strangest thing that ever I heard of in my Life; if this be true, it will be ridiculous to object difficulty against the Christian Institution, for upon this Supposition it is plain there can be nothing but sottishness or obstinacy, cowardice and credulity, to hinder a Man in observing the Laws of it. But I pray however proceed in your method, and shew me also, in the next place, what are those external helps and advantages which you intimated?

The second or external assistance of the Gospel, is the advantage of the Society of a Church.

Sebast. The external advantage of this Religion which I especially intended, is the Institution of a Christian Church, that is, the Son of God the Author of this Religion ordered that all those who imbraced it, and became his Disciples, should not content themselves to live singly and separately, as if they were unconcerned one in another, but unite themselves into a Body of Spiritual Polity; and that although they were to be respectively subject to the Civil Governments under which they lived (at least so far as the Laws of Men intrenched not upon those of his Religion) yet they were to be under a stricter tye of Unity amongst themselves, and to become a distinct Corporation under peculiar Officers, as well as
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for peculiar ends and purposes. Nor was this a mere arbitrary or positive Law of his, and to be observed only because he was commanded it, but as it was enjoined with admirable Wisdom on his part, so it was no less of singular advantage to all his Disciples in innumerable respects, some of which I am ingaged to represent to you in particular.

And first, The Constitution of this Society of a Church, was an excellent Expedient for the preserving and holding up of the Doctrine of Christianity in the World, and for the Prevention both of Corruptions and Errors in the Laws, and of mistakes in the great Motives and Encouragements of this Religion. Hence the Church is called by the Apostle St. Paul, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth*, 1 Tim. 3. 15. not that the Church properly gives authority to the Doctrine of our Religion, for that it hath immediately from our Saviour himself, and from the Miracles wrought by God to attest it (as I shewed before;) but because the Church was the conversatory of the Books wherein the Doctrine was written, and a witness of the aforesaid proofs made of the Divinity of it, and competent to secure us from imposture, and to preserve and hold forth those sacred Books that contained it as the sum and code of our Religion. Accordingly it is observable, that in the rage of Pagan Persecution in the time of *Dioclesian*, and when the Enemies of this Religion grew to that height of Pride and Confidence, as to promise to themselves to root out all memory and re-

The great advantages of Church-Society.

mains of Christianity, the care and zeal of this Society preserved this sacred *depositum* of Holy Scripture intire to after Ages, when otherwise private Persons would or might out of fear and weakness have delivered them up to be destroyed.

Again, Secondly, This way of incorporating Christians in the Society of a Church, was a more easie and ready way for the Instruction of the severall Persons of which that Society consisted, and necessary for the publishing, explaining, and inculcating the Doctrine and Laws of their Religion to them. For if our Saviour had appointed Pastours and not a Flock (unless he had made the former as numerous almost as the latter) it had been impossible that they should have instructed all his Disciples: but now he having appointed and obliged them to joyn together in a Body, the same Pastour and the same Labour that instructs one may instruct many. It is in this case as it is with those Creatures that need the assistance, and are fed by the Hand of Man, God hath ordered them by Nature to joyn in Flocks and Herds, that they might be the more capable of Humane Culture, and answer the labour and care Men bestow upon them; whereas wild Beasts, they live singly, and therefore are left to shift for themselves. Now this is a great advantage to all the Disciples of this Religion, that those that cannot read nor study, nor are capable of feeding themselves, by this Society of a Church, God hath provided a way for their constant and easie Instruction by the publick Ministry of his Gospel.

Moreover,

Moreover, Thirdly, By means of such a Society and Officers appointed over it, there is provision made for the Resolution of all Doubts, and for the ease and satisfaction of melancholy and perplexed Consciences, which is a singular advantage of this Institution of a Church. For it is not to be supposed but that there will be a great number of well-meaning Men who may either want parts and ability to judge of several things that may concern them, or may want leisure to consider so maturely as a difficulty may require, or may not be impartial enough in their own case to guide their own Consciences; now for the relief of such as these, it is of great use to be in the Society of a Church where God hath appointed such to be Officers in it *who have the Spirit of the Lord upon them to preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up the broken hearted, and to comfort those that mourn*, *Isai. 61. 1, 2.* such as have made it their business to study the more difficult points of Religion, that they may be able *to speak a word in season to him that fainteth*, *Isai. 50. 4.* and whose Duty and Province it is not so much to make publick Harangues to the Flock, as by particular application to remove Scruples, to solve Difficulties, and provide for Emergencies; and all this they may well be supposed to be able to do with great sincerity and impartiality, as also with great Authority, and being hereunto appointed by God himself, and assisted herein by the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, There is this farther advantage of this Institution of a Church, that the Members of this Society are not only more likely to animate and inflame one another in the ways of

Vertue and Piety by mutual example, but also being concerned in one another, as of the same Body, and for the Honour of their common Faith and Religion, are authorized to watch over one another, to correct the erroneous, to admonish the careless, to reprove the vicious, to strengthen the weak, to incourage the good, and, in a word, are obliged in an extraordinary manner to all Offices of Charity and Pity towards one another.

All which together must needs be a mighty means of securing both the Doctrine and Practice of Religion and of promoting all the ends of it.

When a Man hath not only the comfort of his private Conscience whensoever he doth bravely, but the publick Acclamations of the whole Church; and contrariwise, when he doth any thing basely and viciously, he is not only under the secret lashes of his own guilty Mind, but exposed to shame and reproach, and incurs the Censure of the whole Society. When a Man cannot be fantastical and affect Novelty, but such an honourable Body is concerned for his danger, and obliged to use their endeavours to reclaim him, and if that be insuccessful are put to make a publick Lamentation for him: nor, on the other side, can any Man acquit himself as a worthy Champion for the Truth, and miss of a Laurel in this World, since he shall be sure to have the Gratulations and honourable Esteem of such a Society. Now if there were no such thing as a Church constituted, there would be very few Men found that would take care of those things, and especially few that would venture upon the ingratefull Office

Office of Reproving: or if perhaps some Persons might be found who had zeal enough to undertake it, yet as in that case it would not easily appear to be their duty; so neither could it be performed with that authority and success as now it may.

But then for the more ordinary Offices of Charity, such as pitying and comforting the weak, succouring the oppressed, and relieving the necessitous; these would not only be coldly performed, but indeed would be thought to be no duties at all, if there was no such thing as a Church whereby Men are incorporated together. For besides that we find very little of this thought of or practised amongst those that are not of this Society; we may also generally take an Estimate of Mens Affection to the Church of Christ, by their Charity to the Members of it. But if Men believe there is such a Society as a Church instituted, and they consider themselves as Members of it, then even self-love (which makes others uncharitable) renders these highly charitable, because they then look upon others as Members of the same Body with themselves.

Fifthly and Lastly, The Establishment of the Society of a Church, and thereby a publick Worship, is an Expedient of unspeakable comfort and encouragement to all humble and modest persons, and especially to such as are truly contrite and broken-hearted, in the addressing their Prayers to Almighty God, animating them against their Sense of the Guilt of their Sins, the unworthiness of their Persons, the imperfection of their Prayers, and affording them

many Arguments of hope for success beyond what they could expect from their private Devotions.

Whilst they consider, in the first place, that they are now in God's House, or *Court of Requests*, where he uses to give audience to poor Suppliants.

Again, Secondly, That their desires are put up by the Hands of God's own Minister whom he hath appointed to present Petitions to himself.

Thirdly, That their Prayers are not offered up singly and alone, but in conjunction with the Devotions of so many other more holy Persons as the whole Church consists of, so that they may hope to speed the better for such company, and especially by the united Efficacy of so many ardent Affections.

And, Lastly, The Faith and Hope of such Men is wonderfully strengthened by the Contemplation of the great Propitiation for sin, made by our Saviour, and represented to their Eyes on the Lord's Table in the Holy Communion. All these things were mightily esteemed by the Christians of old, and certainly are great advantages.

And thus I have now laid before you the peculiar Laws of the Gospel, and shewed you also the admirable Encouragements, and the singular Helps and Assistances God hath afforded us towards the observance of those Laws, and the Prosecution of that Religion. Is there any thing more I can serve you in?

Bioph. Yes, I plainly see there is a great deal more I may learn of you : but God be thanked,
and

and I heartily thank you for what I have learned hitherto.

Sebast. You remember I have opened to you the Grounds and Reason of Religion in general, and thence led you to the Christian Religion in particular, and by the line of that I have now brought you to the Church, and there I leave you in good hands, and I pray God be with you.

Bioph. You have brought me to see the folly of my own Prejudices, which I again thank God and you for: I am convinced of the Reality and Necessity of some Religion or other, and of the Excellency of the Christian Religion above all that ever I heard of, or what I could have imagined; and now I intend in earnest to bethink my self how to live accordingly.

Sebast. Remember withal to keep close to the Church, and be constant and diligent in attendance upon the publick Worship of God there, that will be a means both to keep up that good zeal which you are now under, and to preserve it from running out into wild Extravagancies.

Bioph. I will, *Sebastian*, by God's Grace, I will, and in that course hope to come to Heaven at last.

Phil. What, *Biophilus*, will you turn Knight-Errant now?

Bioph. You neither can nor will, I know *Philander*, so much upbraid me with my former folly, as my own Heart will do it for me; but I will endeavour to make amends for that by my future diligence.

Phil. Ah! God forbid, *Biophilus*, that I, who am sensible of my own many Sins, should upbraid

upbraid your Errors. I embrace you with all my Heart, I heartily welcome you into the way of Heaven; there I am sure the Angels rejoyce at this blessed Change, and nothing less than Devils can repine at it, and they must be a sort of desperate Wretches amongst men that can upbraid you for what is past.

Sebast. Well, good night to you both, Gentlemen, I doubt it grows late.

Phil. I hope, good *Sebastian*, you are not weary of well-doing; I was unwilling to interrupt you and *Biophilus* in your discourse hitherto, both because it exceedingly confirmed and improved me in what (I thank God) I did believe already, and especially because I did not doubt of a good issue of it upon my neighbour; but I have all this while waited for an opportunity to ask your advice in a case or two of very great concernment; and now I intreat you allow me the liberty to do it.

Sebast. I pray God my Power be answerable to my Will to serve you; What is the matter, *Philander*?

Phil. There are these two things I would crave your direction in:

First, By what means a man may maintain his ground, and keep stable and stedfast in Religion in distracted times?

And, Secondly, What course he should take to maintain an even temper and constant chearfulness of Spirit under all the accidents of the present Life?

Sebast. Oh! *Philander*, there you have tied me by the Leg; I cannot stir a foot from you; those two inquiries are both so necessary at all times,

times, and so peculiarly seasonable at this time, that I should neglect my self as well as you, if I should not be willing to consider of them with you ; and it's pity we have not time more fully to treat of them.

But I pray, in the first place, let me know what you mean by Stability in Religion? Would

Of Stability in Religion.

you have a Man be peremptory in his judgment, and unmovable from his first persuasions whatever they were? Do you think it unlawfull or dishonourable for a Man ever to change his Opinion in Religion? This methinks is no better than a Resolution, never to be wiser than a Man is at present ; nay, to be always a child and never to out-grow his youthfull prejudices and follies : you know it is the hard fortune of some Men to have been ill educated, and to have had bad Principles instilled into them in their injudicious years, and it cannot be imputed to such Men as a vicious Levity or Inconstancy, but a very vertuous and commendable thing upon maturer judgment to discard such old Wives Fables or juvenile Fancies.

What is meant by Stability and Constancy in Religion.

Phil. No, *Sebastian*, I do not think the Minds of Men should be after the manner of uninhabited Lands, and become *primi occupantis* ; nor do I call Perseverance in an Error Stability, but Subbornness and Obstinacy. The meaning of my first question therefore is only how a Man shall be inabled to stand firm and tight to the Truth of Christian Religion, that whereof his Judgment is convinced by good Reason, and
whereof

whereof he hath had good Proof and Experience; so that he shall neither be always trying and seeking, and disputing and doubting on the one hand, nor on the other, in danger to be hector'd out of his Conscience by any terrour, nor wheedled and complemented out of it by flattery and insinuation, that no Example of great Men, or of the multitude may bias him, nor Sophistry of cunning Men cheat him of his Religion, no Atheistical Person droll or railly him out of it, nor Scurrility make him ashamed of it.

Sebast. I did not doubt but that was your meaning, and (as I said before) that is a very weighty and important question, both in respect of the many Temptations that may at some times especially put a Man's Constancy hard to it; and in respect also of the mischief of yielding or being baffled in that particular.

The Temptations and Dangers of this kind (as you have well intimated) are many: for a Man may be either undermined by Policy, or battered by plain force; he may be wheedled by Complements, or born down by Authority; imposed upon by Rhetorical flourishes, or circumvented by Sophistry; or some Man may indulge his Curiosity to try all things, who hath neither the judgment to discern, nor the courage to hold fast that which is best.

*The mischiefs of
Levity and Incon-
stancy in Religion.*

And on the other side, the mischief of yielding in this case, or of foregoing the truth (by what means soever it be) is very great. For doubtless Divine Truth, especially that of the Gospel, is a very great *deposi-
tum*, a mighty trust which God hath reposed

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in us, and he that is false to it, and either softly or siliily delivers it up, is a Traitor both against God, and his own Soul.

He sins against God, ungratefully undervaluing so great a Blessing as the knowledge of true Religion, and playing fast and loose with it, as if the Gospel was fit only to serve a turn.

And he intolerably wrongs and cheats himself, abandoning the only effectual Principles of true Piety, and the means of improving himself to a capacity of eternal Happiness. For it is a mighty mistake (as I have noted before) for a Man to think that all Religions are alike, or that so a Man be true to any Principles, the pursuit of them will bring him to Heaven.

It is true, sometimes Men are better than their Opinions, as we see amongst the several sorts of deluded Sectaries: there are some which we cannot but in charity judge to be good Men, but then it must be when the mistake is only in some Notion or inconsiderable Tenets, and when otherwise they are right for the main, but where the error is fundamental, or in the substantial part of Religion, then the very Stewns of Piety are cut, and a Man's zeal in such a case will be wild and fruitless. For as in Nature, it is impossible for Water to rise higher than its Source or Fountain; so it seems to be (at least next to) impossible in morality, that a Man should be better than his Principles. Therefore saith our Saviour, *Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, &c. Matth. 12. 32.* And again, *if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?*

darkness? Matth. 6. 23. As if he had said, " It is true, a Man may *with-hold the truth in un-righteousness*, and be worse in his Life than the Principles of his Mind and Conscience did require; but if a Man's Principles themselves be nought, and if he have embraced a bad Religion, what good can be expected from him? Therefore, I say, a Man horribly cheats his own Soul, who upon any pretence, or under any Temptation whatsoever, forsakes or blanches the true Principles of Religion.

Nay farther, I think it worth the observing that the very unsettledness of a Man's Mind, if it be but in mere Opinion, and although he should all the while keep close to the great Principles of Religion, is a great impediment to the growth of Piety and Vertue. For as we see a Tree, by being often removed (although it should be still to a better Soil) is hindred both in its growth and fruitfulness; so we find by experience, that those who are the most busie disputers, and who most affect Novelty and change of Opinions, do little more than make a noise or a shew in the World, but are so far from improvement in their Lives and Tempers, that contrariwise they grow apparently more passionate, proud, ambitious, censorious and schismatical.

But to be sure he that is facile, and unresolved in his Principles, and of a ductile Conscience, shall never be able to do any honour to his Religion or to himself.

As for his Religion: Who shall perswade me to be of his Principles, whom I perceive to be unresolved of them himself?

And

And for the esteem of his Person that is mutable, this will be his fate, That he shall be scorned as a Renegado by those very Men that at the same time glory in having made him a Profelyte. All which things (and a great many more, which I need not mention to you) do effectually recommend Stability and Constancy in Religion.

Phil. I am well aware of the truth of what you say, and thereupon I do the more earnestly intreat you to give me your Advice in the case, that I may continue stanch and stable against all the Assailants of my Religion, and so avoid all the mischiefs you have given me warning of, as consequent of Levity and Changing.

Sebast. It is not so difficult to give advice in this case (and that such as would effectually do the business too) as it is hard to find Men that ask for it in earnest and with intention to follow it: for some, as I told you before, think it a very indifferent thing what Religion they are of, so they have any thing that is called by that name, at least if it be Christian, and they can see the Appearance of a Church, and the Ceremonies and Appendages of Religion amongst them.

And some are so silly as to think there is no change made if they have but the old Names of things left them; like the *Romans* in their degenerate times, that suffered themselves to be tamely wheedled out of their ancient Liberty, so long as the name of a commonwealth, and a few other terms of Art were retained. Such Men will take Brass-money for good Pay, if they see but the usual Face and Inscription upon

on it, and you may safely steal away their Goose if you stick but down a Feather in the room of it. Some are so childishly fond of Pomp and Ceremony, that if there appear more of that than ordinary, they will believe Religion to be only improved and not changed.

Some again have such a sickly longing after Novelty, that they will be always making Experiments though it be at the hazard of their own Souls, and some love their Religion well enough if it cost them nothing : but they will run no hazards for it. And in fine, there are others that think it a wise thing to sacrifice a Conscience to gain a potent Friend, and a goodly purchase to buy the present World with the loss of that which is to come.

But I am satisfied of the sincerity of your Temper, and therefore in answer to your Demand, I recommend to you these three or four things.

*Directions for the
keeping men stable
in the true Religion.*

I. In the first place, you know that your Religion, I mean that which you have been trained up in by the Church of England, and which you have always professed, is a Scriptural Religion, *i. e.* such an one as hath not merely prescribed for it self by custom (though it be certainly elder than those that do so) nor derived it self from that headless Monster, unaccountable Tradition, no nor yet from the Subtilty of Humane Philosophy (though it have more reason to plead for it self than any other) but hath taken its rise from Holy Scripture and Divine Revelation, and consequently as it is to be proved, so it is to be disproved

disproved thence, or nothing can be said to the purpose against it.

Therefore my first Advice is, That you study the Holy Scripture diligently, and stick close to that; that, as St. Paul hath assured us, *is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works,* 2 Tim. 3. 16. and from thence a Man may be able to give a reason of the hope that is in him, 1 Pet. 3. 15. i. e. make a sufficient Apology for, and Defence of his Religion.

1. *Keep close to the Holy Scriptures.*

I do not mean hereby, either altogether to evacuate the authority of laudable Custom in some certain cases; or much less, that either Tradition or Humane Learning was to be slighted; nor least of all, that the Scripture was so far a measure of our practice, as that every thing became unlawfull and not to be admitted in practice, which is not to be proved by express Scripture.

For God supposed us to be Men of understanding when he gave us Divine Revelation, and thought fit to leave some Circumstances of things to be defined by Humane Prudence.

But this I think is certain, that if we pretend our Religion to be derived from Scripture, we must then admit nothing which is contrary to that Rule, no nor account any thing to be essential to it which that hath not provided for.

For as it could not stand with the Divine Wisdom to abound in superfluities, or to give

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express

express directions for what was sufficiently provided for before; so neither could it consist with his Goodness to provide a Rule which was defective in Necessaries.

And this I think (by the way) was the prime excellency of the Reformation, that (although some things perhaps might be erroneous, and many things imperfect in it) yet it revived the true Canon of Christian Religion, the Holy Scripture, and so put into Mens hands an easie and certain Rule to go by, for besides other advantages of this Rule, it sets us upon even ground with the most cunning Adversaries, and forces them to play upon the square with us. Forasmuch as this (as to the main lines of it) is fitted for all Capacities, that every Man may see the Grounds of his Religion.

As for Example, if any Man should perswade me to worship an Idol, or to worship the True God by and under an Image, let such a Man use all the Art and Sophistry he can, he will never be able to impose upon him that studies and sticks to the Holy Scriptures.

Or if another should go about to perswade me there was an easier and shorter way to Heaven than by an Holy Life, and that there might be either Distinctions or Dispensations, or some way or other of Commutation found out which would excuse me that trouble and do my business as well: I can never be cheated into such a Perswasion whilst I consult the Holy Scripture, which is as plain and as full as can be desired in both those cases: Therefore, as I said; stick close to the Holy Scripture, as you desire to hold your Religion.

2. But if it shall happen that either any thing in the Scripture should seem so obscure, or that the Sophistry of cunning Men should cast such a Mist before us that we are not able to determine our selves what to do. Then, in the second place, we are to resort to our Spiritual Guides, which God hath set over us, who have baptized us into, and trained us up in our Religion to help us out.

2. *Make use of our
Spiritual Guides.*

This is also a means of Stability of God's own appointing; for the Apostle hath told us that God hath erected those Orders of Men in his Church that we should *not be as Children toss'd to and fro by every Wind of Doctrine, and by the cunning craftiness of Men who lie in wait to deceive*, Ephes. 4. 14. And these having made it their whole business and study to be fit for their Office, and to be acquainted with the *Depths of Satan*, as well as the Mystery of Christianity; I mean, to be able to detect the Frauds and Sophistry of Deceivers, as well as to understand and explicate the Holy Scripture, and the deep Points of Religion; and being also ordinarily to be presumed, Men of Prudence and Experience, it must needs be very fit that these should be consulted and hearkened to with reverence, especially by those that have been destitute of the aforesaid Advantages, and it is very unreasonable that any Man should make so great a Change as that of his Religion is, without the best advice and most mature Deliberation of this kind.

And this is especially to be heeded in this present Age when such crafty Gamesters are

abroad that use such Legerdemain, and to cogg the Die (as the Apostle's Phraſe imports in the fore-mentioned place) when, I ſay, there is *ſuch Fox-like Craft, and ſuch Methods of Deceit* to gain Proſelytes, That the neglect of this Caution ſeems to be the principal defect and danger of the Members of this Church. The Men of other Perſwaſions, follow their Guides with an implicate Faith and a blind Obedience, and are ſcarce permitted the uſe of their reaſon, or to chuſe for themſelves even in the moſt indifferent things. And if we will not uſe ſo much Deference to our Paſtors as to think they may ſee farther than we in controverted Caſe; we ſhall be in danger to hold our Religion no longer than till we ſhall be briskly aſſaulted.

3. *Contempt of the World is neceſſary to Stability in Religion.*

3. He that would be ſtable in his Religion, muſt learn to condemn the preſent World, without which both the former advices will be utterly inſignificant for his ſecurity againſt Apoſtaſie. If a Man have the preſent World in admiration, it will daze his Eyes, blind his Judgment, prejudice his Mind, bribe his Affections, and debauch his Conſcience; for it cannot be but Religion, and the things of another World muſt be cheap with him that over-values the preſent.

Judas, we know, ſold our Saviour at the ſame rate of thirty pieces of Silver; but Preferment and Honour, Wealth and Glory, are ſo great motives, that the Devil had the Confidence to hope to prevail upon our Saviour himſelf to fall down and worſhip him, when he ſhewed him the Kingdoms of the World, and the
Glory

Glory of them, and offered them to him at that price.

To swim in Pleasure, flow with Wealth, and be at the top of the World in Glory, what will not this do with unmortified Hearts? Such Men in such a case will (it may be) at first strain Curtesie with Conscience, and find out a thousand Shifts and Distinctions to excuse themselves; but rather than fail (and if that will not do) they will cut the knot they cannot untie, and rudely break with Conscience, rather than withstand so great allurements.

Therefore, *Philander*, if you and I would stick fast to our Principles, we must sit somewhat loose to the World, we must entertain no great opinion concerning Wealth and Honour, but be content with little things for the present, and comfort our selves with the Expectation of great in another World. We must consider with our selves how vain and empty those things are, even in this Life, and whilst they are enjoy'd, and especially how perfectly they vanish, and are of no avail at all at the Day of Judgment: *We must look at the things which are not seen, and are eternal, the crown of Life, 2 Cor. 4. ult.* (I mean) which God hath prepared for all *those that are faithfull to the death, Rev. 2. 10.* Then shall we be stable as the center of the Earth, unchangeable as the Heavens, brave and courageous so as to scorn allurements, contemn danger, and be true to our real Interest, our Conscience, our God, and our Religion.

3. *Fervent and constant Prayer to God.*

4. If especially to all these, in the last place, we joyn fervent and constant Prayer to God: for we are not to trust to our selves, but commend to him the fixing our minds and establishing our hearts; he made them and knows them, and he only can confirm and strengthen them against all our own folly and levity, and against all the temptations of the Devil; he can provide that we shall not be led into temptation, or however, *that no temptation shall overtake us but what we shall be able to bear*; he can deliver us from all the snares that shall be laid for us, and help us to elude all Sophistry; and, in a word, can upon Emergency, and in the very nick of time, bestow *upon us such a spirit and wisdom as none of our adversaries shall be able to withstand*, Luk. 21. 15.

These, *Philander*, are the most effectual things I can think of for the present, in answer to your first question.

Phil. I thank you heartily, *Sebastian*, for the great satisfaction you have given me, and I shall make it both my own care and the matter of my Prayer to God, that neither the levity of my own Mind, nor the importunity of others, shall tempt me from the good old way of the Church of *England*; and that neither any effort of Wit or Power, the blandishments of Prosperity, nor the storms of Adversity, shall stagger my Resolution.

And now, because I would not be troublesome to you too long, be pleased as briefly as the case will bear to resolve me also in my second inquiry, namely, By what means I may maintain

tain a constant chearfulness of Spirit in the course of Christianity. You made it evident at the beginning of this present Conference, that there is such a thing attainable, and you will not wonder that I am inquisitive after so inestimable a good: And the rather because (it is in vain to be ashamed to tell you what you cannot but have observed your self in me) for my own part, though I am sometimes very comfortable, and now and then as full of joy as my Heart can hold, yet at other times (whether it be occasioned by any error of my life, or by the effect of my Constitution of Body, or the weakness of my Mind, I cannot tell) it is quite otherwise with me, and my Spirits sink as low as they were high before. Now there-

Inquiry by what means a Man may maintain an even temper of spiritual comfort.

fore give me your advice how I may maintain an even temper of chearfulness, so that I may neither seem to be Infidel nor Enthusiast, neither disparage the Power of Religion by meanness of Spirit, not rendring it suspected to be merely the acting of a part by my over-doing and pretending to too high flights of Joy.

Sebast. This second inquiry of yours, *Philander*, is no less usefull than the former, for (as you have well intimated) not only the happiness of a Man's own Life depends upon it, but the Reputation of Religion it self is very much concerned in the temper of Spirit, which he expresses under it. For what stranger to Religion would not be afraid of it, that observes the melancholy Complaints, the perpetual Scruples, the dolefull Sighs and dismal

Countenances of some that pretend to it? And on the other hand; What sober Man would not take it to be an Enthusiastick Frenzy, when he observes Men to be rapt up into the third Heaven (at least in their own conceit) but can give no rational account of it? And again; what wise Man shall observe the uncertainty of Mens temper in this respect, and not suspect whether that can have any solid Foundation it self whose Effects are so volatile and inconstant.

This being the consequence of the case, it is very fit it should be provided for accordingly. Now though what I have said already whilst I was answering *Biophilus's* Objections against the comfortableness of Religion, will in a good measure come up to this point, especially if you lay all those things together which were occasionally scattered through that dispute; yet for your satisfaction, as well as for the importance of the matter, I will not grudge the pains to resume that subject, and give you my thoughts more fully and directly now, which before I did only briefly and by the bye.

Now in order to the determining of the method and means of settled peace and an even temper of Spiritual Comfort, it is necessary that we discover the several causes of the Interpretation thereof, and when we have found them, if we can apply proper and peculiar Remedies to each of them, then we shall do your business.

As for the former, *viz.* the causes of the Unevenness of a Christian's Spirit, or the Interruptions of his Spiritual Comfort, they are easily found out, and I do not doubt but they may be reckoned to be these five following:

Namely,

Namely, either, 1. Unevenness and Irregularity of Life. Or,

2. Undue Apprehensions of God. Or,

3. Mistake of the terms of the Gospel. Or,

4. Sad Accidents externally. Or,

5. Melancholy of Body.

1. In the first place, I account the Irregularity of Mens Lives to be a very common and the most ordinary cause of the Unevenness of their Comfort.

A constant and even course of Piety is the first and principal means of a constant and even temper of heart.

All vertuous Actions have naturally Peace and tranquility belonging to them ; for, besides the pleasant Air of good Reputation that attends them, and that a Man who hath the least value for applause that can be, is, notwithstanding, insensibly made more chearfull by it, it is a great deal more to have a Man's own Conscience approve him, and especially when he considers that he doth what God is well pleased with, and that which he will not fail one way or other to give Testimony to, and shew his Approbation of.

On the contrary, all vicious Actions are naturally uncomfortable ; for, besides the infamy that attends them, they have guilt inseparably adheres to them ; and God's displeasure intailed upon them. For as he can never either hate Vertue or love Vice without a flat Contradiction to his own Nature, so neither can he, or will he frown upon the one, or shine upon the other.

Now therefore if a Man be habitually vicious, he must needs be habitually sad and miserable
(with-

(without that more miserable and fordid Refuge, Drunkenness, that filthy Dose for the Gripes of Conscience.) And if a Man be habitually Good and Holy, and maintains a constant course of Piety and Vertuous Actions, he will be habitually comfortable, and under a constant ray of light and glory. But if a Man be up and down in his life, sometimes good, and sometimes bad, or at least sometimes brave and generous, and at other times flat and careless, he cannot expect that his comforts should be more constant than he himself is: for the effects must follow the condition of their causes.

In this case therefore the Disease leads to the Remedy, he that would maintain an even temper of Peace in his Conscience, must be sure to maintain an even course of Vertue and Piety in his Life. For it is not only impossible to secure the former without the latter, but it is ridiculous to pretend to it; nay farther, if it should happen that any Man found his Heart chearfull extraordinarily upon other terms, he would have just cause to suspect a delusion of the Devil.

God is constantly of the same Mind, Religion and the terms of happiness are constant and settled; therefore there can be no way to constant Comfort in the one, or Hopes in the other, but by being constant to our selves and to our duty; nor can there be any cause of uncertainty, but the unsettledness of our own Hearts. But if a Man live so, as that it become matter of difficult dispute, whether he be a good Man or no, it must needs be much more so, whether he shall go to Heaven or no, and then

then I think it is out of dispute, whether such a Man can be comfortable or not. Let the Man therefore that aims at a settled Peace, be sure to be constant and thorough paced in his duty, that it become not only a bias upon him, but the very method and habit of his Life; and let foolish People, if they will, all this formality and a road of Religion, for if it be a road, it is certainly the narrow one that leads to life; for never is Religion as it should be, till it become thus natural and habitual. Yet lest any Man should by reason of the easiness of this state, when it is arrived at, interpret it to be but formality, let him withall embrace all opportunities of doing not only strictly necessary duties, but brave and generous actions, that so he may demonstrate zeal as well as constancy, and an ardency of affection to God and Goodness; and he that takes this course, shall effectually secure himself against the first cause of uncomfortableness.

2. The second cause of spiritual dejection I reckoned to be undone apprehensions of God, and this generally goes

Right Notions of God is the next step to settled Peace.

a great way in the disquiets and disorders of most well-meaning but weak People; for whereas, if things be rightly considered, the very first Notion of a God is an everlasting spring of hope, and the right understanding of his Goodness is the great sweetner of a Man's Spirits, and that which principally disposes him to cheerfulness, it is common with weak or deluded People either to receive such Impressions from others, or ignorantly to frame such an Image of

of God in their own Minds as they must eternally hate, but cannot possibly love. And if the Thoughts of God be unpleasant to them, it must needs follow that all the duties of Religion must go on heavily, and when they have done, their hopes must be flat, and all about them looks melancholy.

The principal thing I aim at in this place, is when Men have such a Notion of God as renders his Actions as necessary as his Nature; and because (as I have shewed to *Biophilus*) he was from Eternity, and could not but be, therefore they conceit he cannot but do whatsoever is done as necessarily as he exists, and so unawares they set a surly and rigid Fate over themselves instead of a wise and good God. For in pursuance of this Notion they conclude he must be just to extremity, and that he is bound to vindicate himself rigorously, so that he cannot abate or remit of his own right, but must exact the utmost Farthing; and on the other side, they fantasie that he cannot but do all the good he doth, and must upon necessity of nature make all the Expressions of kindness that are possible.

The former of these is very horrible; for (though in one respect it renders God less than a Man, for we both can (and ought in many cases to) recede from our own right, yet upon the whole) it must needs be an hard Chapter, nay, a most killing Consideration to such imperfect and guilty Creatures as we are, to think our selves under a God that cannot pardon properly, that can pass no Act of Grace, but must rigidly exact his Right one way or other :

for

for then what can my Prayers, and Tears, and Repentance, and even Reformation it self signify? And though there be a Mediator and a Satisfaction spoken of in the Gospel, yet the apprehension of such a supreme Being is able to render even that Remedy suspicious, or however to make a Man's Heart ake and tremble all the days of his Life; but to be sure he can take no delight in God, whatever hopes he may have in a Saviour.

And then, on the other side, the apprehension of the necessity of the Acts of Divine Goodness renders him as contemptible as the former made him terrible. For who can think himself bound to love and thank him for that which he could not chuse but do? And besides, this renders all Prayers and Addresses to such a God as fruitless as the other. For what need I pray to him that cannot do otherwise than he doth?

But the mistake all this while lies here; neither of these sorts of Men consider that God is a free Agent, and consequently though he cannot chuse but be just and righteous in all his dealings, yet he is bound by nothing but his own good pleasure to exercise such, or such instances of Justice. He may punish, or he may pardon upon what terms he pleases, and so far as he pleases; *He hath Mercy because he will have Mercy, and because Mercy pleases him:* And so for his Goodness, though he is infinitely full and perfect, and consequently delights to communicate himself to his Creatures, yet all the Instances and Expressions of it are free and voluntary; he is not bound to do such things
merely

merely because they are good in the general, but accordingly as his own Wisdom directs him, and as they shall serve the Ends of that in particular. And then every good Man that lives under these Apprehensions may be generously comfortable, and neither be tempted to despise God as a soft and good-natur'd Being, on the one side, nor to be horribly afraid of him, and hate him, on the other.

Right apprehension of the temper and demand of the Gospel is another means of settled peace.

3. Another cause of Un-comfortableness is, when Men do not rightly understand the terms of the Gospel, but either mistake the Opinions and Traditions of Men for the Definitions of God, or at least confound what God designs to bring us up to by the Gospel as a State of Perfection, with what he strictly requires and insists upon as the Conditions of Salvation. Hence it comes to pass that they are not able to make any good Judgment of their own Estate, but are either apt to comply with the flatteries of their own Hearts, and pronounce comfort to themselves upon too loose terms; or on the other side, to yield to their own Melancholy by too severe and rigid a Censure of themselves; or lastly, will waver between both, according as they meet with a New Book, a New Saying, or an unusual Accident, and so be by fits sad or chearfull, as it happens.

Now for this, it is to be considered, that though the Gospel sometimes seems to be very strict and severe, or at least very accurate in its Prescriptions, which it doth, partly for the Honour

Honour and Perfection of that Religion, partly that by means to screw us up to as high a Pitch as possible; for it is certain if our Copy or Rule should be low and mean, our endeavours should be slackned, and our performances would fall so very short that we should not be tolerable Christians: Again, on the other side, though the same Gospel at other times speaks very condescendingly and seems to make so great allowances to humane Infirmary, as if it was a very easie matter to be saved; and this it doth to encourage especially men of melancholy and dejected Tempers, and to bear them up against the sad Reflections they are apt to make either upon their former Sins, or their daily Infirmities.

Yet all this while God is of one Mind, and the New Testament hath a determinate Sense:

Namely, That whatsoever shall give evidence of a Man's Sincerity, *i. e.* that he hath a principle of Divine Life in him, and a true Love of God and Goodness, this shall be sufficient to his Salvation; and as nothing less than this shall be accepted, so nothing more is indispensibly required.

For the Salvation or Damnation of Men depends not upon Punctilio's or nice Points of Dispute, as if God had a Mind by the means of a subtil Interpretation to save and damn Men arbitrarily, therefore he lays no stress upon their being, or not being, of such an Opinion, nor takes the advantage of a Ceremony under or over; for the Apostle hath told us, *That the Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost,*

Ghost, Rom. 14. 17. and again, *That neither Circumcision availeth any thing nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature*, Gal. 6. 15.

Nay, it is true also that God decides not Mens final Estate (one way or other) merely upon the account of such Duties performed, or such Sins committed: but that which he principally looks at in this case is an ingenuous or dis-ingenuous temper towards himself, and a capacity or fitness for the state of Heaven on the one side, and a temper and disposition fit for Hell and the Devil on the other.

That (I say) which God expressly requires as the Condition of Salvation, is an habit and temper of Obedience, and an ingenuous frame of Heart towards himself and his Laws. And that this is not to be estimated Arithmetically, or by tale of such a number of Performances, but rather Geometrically, in proportion to the heartiness and sincerity of the Man, and with respect to the circumstances he stands in; that is, as well making allowance for his temptations, afflictions, ignorances, infirmities and surprisals, as raising the reckoning in consideration of extraordinary light, knowledge, opportunities, encouragements and advantages whatsoever. Accordingly we find the Apostle to make a supposition, that a Man *may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burnt also, and yet want charity* and the love of God, 1 Cor. 13. 3. and yet our Saviour on the other hand tells us, that, *whosoever shall give a cup of cold water only to a Disciple, shall not lose his reward*, Matth. 10. 42.

So that (as I said) sincerity is the only thing in question, especially as to the business of a constant and even temper of Spiritual Peace. Now that is easie to be decided, and a Man needs not to run himself into nice Disputes, endless Scruples and perplexities about it; for whosoever endeavours to live well according to the Gospel, will easily be sensible of his own sincerity. For as it is no hard matter for a Man to know concerning himself, whether he hath carried himself faithfully towards his Friend, or with a filial reverence towards his Father, and he may as easily tell whether he hath dealt treacherously with the one, or been stubborn, and careless of offending the other; and accordingly (if they be wise and worthy Persons he hath to deal with) he may assure himself of the love of the former and of the paternal affection of the latter, notwithstanding that possibly he may be conscious to himself to have done some things unadvisedly, and to have failed in circumstances towards them both: So I see no reason to doubt but that upon the same terms a Man may be able to witness to himself his own integrity and simplicity towards God his truest Friend and most affectionate Father, and thereupon look chearfully up to him as such, and walk comfortably before him, especially having so good assurance, (as I shewed before) that he is far from being a captious Deity.

4. Again, there is a Fourth very common occasion of uncomfortableness, namely, the grievance of external Accidents and Calami-

Faith in God against all accidents and out-
ties,

ward Affections another means of constant Peace and Comfort.

ties, which may and do frequently befall the best Men, and which either by their sharpness discompose a Christian, or by the multitude and severity of them may tempt him to question how he stands in the favour of God who permits such things to befall him, or at least by their often and yet uncertain Returns may make the Pulse of his Heart beat very unequally.

Against this there is no more proper Remedy than to rouse up our selves, and to act a generous Faith in God.

Considering, in the first place, that this is his usual method with those he loves best, to exercise them with affliction, and that Affliction is so far from being a Token of his Hatred, that on the contrary, there is no more dangerous sign of God's having quite deserted and abandoned a Man, than for him to use no Chastisement towards him. *If ye receive not chastisement, saith the Apostle, ye are Bastards, and not Sons.* And therefore we see the very Eternal Son of God when he came upon Earth and was in our Nature, was the most remarkable Instance of a *Man of Sorrows* that ever was in the World, insomuch that it is not easie to imagine what calamity can befall any Man which is not to be paralleled, if not exceeded in the Sufferings of our Saviour, and as if God had ordered it so on purpose to this end, that no Man might complain of his share, or especially despair and think himself forsaken of God because of his Adversities.

And

And then in the second place, assuring our selves that as all afflictions come from God, so they shall *certainly be made to work for good to all those that love him*, Rom. 8. 28. For unless we humour our selves, and indulge our Passion too much, we may discover that there is hardly any affliction befalls, but what we may be bettered by, even for the present if we will; but there can be no doubt but God both can and will turn it to our advantage in the issue and upshot of things: and therefore we have no reason to be too much dejected upon such an occasion.

But that which is to be the principal exercise of our Faith in such a case, and of most effectual consideration, is, That God hath provided another World, and a estate of unmixed and uninterrupted joy there, when this short and troublesome life is ended. And if we fix our thoughts there (which we have great reason to do, considering the happiness is so unspeakably great, the certainty of it is so full, and the time so short for the accomplishment of it) we shall then count *all the sufferings of the present not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall then be revealed*. Rom. 8. 18. and be far from fainting under the sharpest of Adversities, *whilst thus we look not at the things which are seen, and are but temporal, but at the things which are not seen, and are eternal*, 2 Cor. 4. 18.

5. But fifthly and lastly, the most general cause of the uncomfortableness of the Spirits of pious Men, and of the unevenness of their temper, is bodily melancholy;

*Advice in the
case of bodily melan-
choly.*

choly; that black humour is apt to diffuse it self all over, so as to cloud the Judgment, and taint the eye of the Mind, that every thing shall look of its own colour, black and dismal, when this predominates, and at least while the Fit lasts, God is dreadful, his Laws are impossible, the guilt of sin is unpardonable, and even the most pitiable infirmities of Mankind (especially those which such a Man can observe in himself) are aggravated so as to bear the symptoms of Reprobation, and every affliction is looked upon as a forerunner of the Vengeance of Hell Fire.

Melancholy in the Body becomes Jealousie in the Mind, and renders a Man always suspicious and uneasy, and to be continually searching for what he would be loth to find; he is always trying and examining his own case to God-ward with that severity, as if he was desirous to discover flaws in his hopes and evidences of Salvation; one while he is a little revived, and sees no reason to doubt his own Estate, but by and by he revokes the most deliberate conclusions of his own Conscience, and then again falls into the other extreme, and is altogether in the altitudes, but always uneven and unsettled.

Now for remedy of this, it is more than half way of the cure to understand the Disease, and yet that is no more than to be aware that melancholy is both cause and effect, and that that alone is able to act all this Tragedy without any other cause of sadness and disquiet, than merely the diffidence and mistrust of a Man's own temper. And that betrays it self
notoriously

notoriously in this, that such a Man can assign no reason of his trouble, but only he is troubled, and he is again troubled that he is so. Now if a Man could give any such account of his uncomfortable fears as were sufficient to satisfy any Man besides himself, then it would be reasonable not to charge them upon melancholy, but upon those just causes; but if no such causes be assignable, then it is manifestly temper that is in fault without guilt or danger; and this one thing considered is able to relieve a Man out of his perplexity, and his Mind may arrive at some tolerable measure of chearfulness, even in the midst of this bodily infirmity.

But if the understanding of such a Man be too weak, or the Disease of melancholy be too strong upon him to be cured this way; then the next thing to be done (after the use of Physick for the body) is to resort to some able and experienced Physician of Souls, and sincerely to lay open the state of his Conscience to him: and having so done, to rest upon the judgment of that other person, seeing he is not able to judge for himself, or not willing to rely upon his own judgment. And this is not only a way of present relief, but very safe and reasonable, and can have no such thing as an implicate faith imputed to it. For so long as the perplexed person can give any reason of his doubts and fears, so long the spiritual Guide is bound to give satisfaction to his reason, and to answer the just causes of his trouble; but when that is done, and the poor Man is perplexed without cause, it is apparent there is nothing but melancholy in the case, and then nothing can be more fit and proper

proper than that the weak should lean upon the strong, and this poor distressed Creature should support himself by the Authority of God's Minister, who must be supposed to be able to judge in such a case, and cannot be suspected to be partial, because he hath no interest to serve by so doing.

And farther, the more effectually to relieve such a pitiable Person, it seems very necessary that after due Preparation thereunto, and all fit solemnity, the Man of God should proceed to a particular absolution of his Patient, not only to assure him of the good grounds he went upon in the judgment he gave of his estate before, but to raise his Spirits by the sacredness of the Action, and the hopes that God will ratifie in Heaven what is thus done on Earth by his Minister. This course is recommended by our Church as a *specifick* in such cases, and was of constant practice in the Primitive Church in such extremities, instead of that customary, general, and formal Auricular Confession, which (in ignorant and corrupt ages) came in the room of it.

After all, I would earnestly advise such a Man (as we speak of) not to smother his thoughts in his own bosom, but by all means to let his Heart take Air ; for there is hardly any serious Person so weak and injudicious, that a melancholy Man had not better consult with than himself ; nay, many times the putting a question to a Post or Pillar, will help him to an answer better than revolving of it altogether in his own Breast ; but especially it is to be recommended to him, that he give not himself up to solitude and retirement, which thickens the
Blood

Blood, and feeds the Disease, but that he frequent the Company and Conversation of good Men; their society will not only divert him, but their chearfulness will refresh him, and the very observing of their infirmities will tend to his comfort, as giving him cause to suspect his own austerity, and so inclining him to pass a more mild censure upon himself.

And thus, I think, *Philander*, I have satisfied your second inquiry, and have done it more largely than I intended, or than you expected. And now, once again, Good night.

Phil. Good night heartily, good *Sebastian*.

F I N I S.

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